DEFIANT FAITH AND THE COLONIAL MATRIX: THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE FORMATION OF THE ZAPATISTA NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY AND THE FIGHT FOR LIBERATION IN THE LACANDON JUNGLE

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation uses decolonial theory to analyze the formation of the Zapatista National Liberation Army and the role of religion in the uprising of the indigenous communities of the Lacandon Jungle in Chiapas. For more than five hundred years, religion has played a part in the subjugation of different communities by joining forces with oppressive institutions. Paradoxically at the same time religion has been instrumental in empowering some of the most marginalized members of society to stand up and fight for their liberation. Each chapter begins by highlighting important events in the Zapatista movement, events that are evaluated against the backdrop of a larger process that goes back to 1492.

The first chapter uses the works of decolonial theorists Walter Mignolo and Enrique Dussel in order to understand the colonial ideology that contributed to the marginalization of the indigenous population in Anahuac and Twantinsuyu. It explores how the Spanish Crown supported by the Church used racial classification to subjugate particular ethnic and religious communities first in the Iberian Peninsula and then later in the Americas.

The second chapter analyzes how religion as a discipline was instrumental in the conquest of the Americas and the suppression of the indigenous population. First, it explores the

theological concepts that inspired the Spanish conquistadors to coerce the natives of the 'New World.' At the same time, it examines the role of the Church in supporting the colonizers' plan.

The third chapter offers a different perspective on how religion—how it began to play a role in the liberation of the most vulnerable members of society starting five hundred years ago and continuing to the Zapatista movement of today. It highlights several figures considered to be pioneers in this then-emerging field of Liberation Theology in Latin America.

The fourth chapter highlights the arrival of Islam in the Americas and the causes that led to the migration of this religious tradition. This chapter explores the current role of Islam in the EZLN or Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) and the impact in the indigenous community.

The fifth chapter explores the role of native Mesoamerican spirituality in inspiring indigenous communities to revolt against their oppressors over the last five hundred years. It examines how the *Popol Vuh*—the sacred book of the Maya—gave meaning to the EZLN's revolt and identifies and explores several historical events in which indigenous people found the inspiration in religion and spiritual ideals to fuel their revolt against the oppressive system.

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Introduction

On January 1, 1994 while the world seemed to be hungover from the New Year's Eve celebration and as the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect in the countries in the northern hemisphere of the American continent, over five thousand indigenous under the flag of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) stormed into the national spotlight by holding hostages the cities of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Ocosingo, Las Margaritas, Altamirano, Chanal, Oxchuc and Huixtán in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. With their faces masked to become "faceless, anonymous, [and] without identity"[1] but with the desire for their dreams and aspirations to be known to the world, the insurgent army took possession of federal buildings using outdated military rifles, sticks, machetes, and a new vision for the future of their communities. As the different media outlets frantically tried to cover the story, people began to ask about their intentions: Who were these troublemakers and what were their objectives? Why were they disrupting the peace by declaring war against the Mexican Government? Would their actions derail the progress toward more modern enterprises that the cabinet of President Salinas in partnership with the United States and Canada were trying to advance? Fortunately, the world didn't have to guess at the answers: for soon designated members of the EZLN read an official statement from the balconies of different federal buildings under the control of the EZLN. In its first paragraph, "The First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle" introduced the Zapatista movement and explained its reasons for the uprising:

> We are the product of five hundred years of struggle: first against slavery; then in the insurgent-led war of Independence against Spain; later in the fight to avoid being absorbed by North American expansion; next to proclaim our Constitution and expel the

[1] Alex Khasnabish, *Zapatistas: Rebellion from the Grassroots to the Global* (London: Fernwood Publishing, 2010), 12.

> French from our soil; and finally, after the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz refused to fairly apply the reform laws, in the rebellion where the people created their own leaders. In that rebellion Villa and Zapata emerged—poor men, like us. We are denied the most elementary education so that they can use us as cannon fodder and plunder our country's riches, uncaring that we are dying of hunger and curable diseases. Nor do they care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, no decent roof over our heads, no land no work, no health, no food, no education. We do not have the right to freely and democratically elect our own authorities, nor are we independent of foreigners, nor do we have peace or justice for ourselves and our children. But today we say enough![2]

The rebel army's first words clarified how that movement was not a spontaneous event staged with the objective of making the local news. Instead their insurrection was a carefully planned strategy shaped by a series of events dating back to the arrival of Spanish Conquistadores in 1492.

The repercussions of these events had left them, the "inheritors of the true builders"[3] of Mexico (as they described themselves in this First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle) dispossessed from the most basic aspects of life, a fact they highlight multiple times. The effect of centuries lacking these basic necessities of "work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace"[4] left them, they felt, with no choice but to arm themselves and fight for survival. At the same time, their determination means they are not prepared to end the struggle until they have the opportunity to form a government that is "free and democratic."[5]

Even though much has been published regarding the history of oppression experienced by indigenous communities in Chiapas, a history that ultimately drove those communities to

[2] Subcomandante Marcos, *Shadows of Tender Fury: The Letters and Communiques of Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995), 54.

[3] Marcos, *Shadows of Tender Fury,* 54.

[4] Marcos, *Shadows of Tender Fury,* 54.

[5] Marcos, *Shadows of Tender Fury,* 54.

organize, speak up and fight back, not much research has been done on the topic of religion as contributing factor to their subjugation. Nor has there been much research on whether religion and spirituality inspired the revolt by the EZLN against the colonial matrix power. The records show that many leaders of the Zapatista movement claim to be impartial regarding religion. Some identify themselves as Marxian atheists and even would quote the words once said by subcomandante Marcos, currently known by his other *nom de guerre* subcomandante Insurgente Galeano[6]: "You go around saying that God is going to support you in the struggle. This isn't correct, compañeros. God, yes, he came into the world, but they killed him, so there is no God now. Now God is worth shit. Now this Bible is worth shit; it is the book of a coward. Our only God now is a gun. This is our God (as he held up his gun)."[7] In one instance, when asked why the EZLN didn't speak on the subject of religion, subcomandante Insurgente Marcos replied: "The reason Zapatistas refrained from any mention of religion was the fear that the Maya community would see the Zapatistas as just another religious group trying to missionize them. If they did, the war of liberation would become a religious war over religious beliefs systems."[8]

[6] In May 2, 2014, after the death of a teacher at the Escuelita Zapatista named José Luis Solis Lopez, who had adopted the nickname 'Galeano' in imitation of the Uruguayan author of 'The Open Veins of Latin America,' Subcommandante Marcos, which is also another *nom de guerre* used by Rafael Sebastian Guillen Vicente, adopted the name Galeano, explaining that "one of us must die so that Galeano can live, so death does not take a life but a name." According to Leonidas Oikonomakis, contributor to ROAR Magazine, "Adopting the *nom de guerre* of a fallen comrade is nothing new in Mexico's revolutionary history, nor in the history of the EZLN itself. It's actually a tradition for the fallen comrade not to be forgotten but rather to 'live on' through the adopted *nom de guerre*." (Leonidas Oikonomakis, "Farewell Marcos, Long Live Subcomandante Galeano!" *ROAR Magazine*, May 26, 2014, https://roarmag.org/essays/subcomandante-marcos-steps-down-galeano)

[7] John D. Early, *Maya and Catholic Cultures in Crisis* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 288.

[8] Early, *Maya and Catholic Cultures in Crisis*, 311.

Even though the EZLN has publicly dissociated itself from adopting and promoting any particular religious beliefs system, this dissertation shows that the subject of religion played an important role in the formation of the Zapatista movement, starting five hundred years ago and leading to the current struggle with the Mexican government. The primary aim of this research in the first chapter is to explore the religious foundations that led to the categorization of people in the colonial world prior to the arrival of Europeans in the Americas. Secondly, in the next chapter I will investigate the method of evangelization used by the Spanish conquistadors to subjugate the indigenous communities in this continent. In the third chapter I argue that the birthplace of Liberation Theology was Mexico prior to the Medellin conference in 1968 with the early work of Bartolomé de Las Casas, Don Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, and Bishop Samuel Ruiz. The fourth chapter looks at the arrival of Islam in the Lacandon Jungle and examines what role it played in the struggle of the indigenous communities. This dissertation study concludes with an exploration of the role of Mesoamerican spirituality in resisting colonial forces in the Chiapas region.

Chapter 1

Race, Religion, and the Invention of America:

Colonial Foundations and the Marginalization of the Indigenous Community in Chiapas

Most historical accounts associate the birth of the Zapatista movement with the day its campaign entered international consciousness on January 1, 1994. Perhaps this was due to their strong opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement (or NAFTA), the trilateral trading bloc encompassing the United States, Canada, and Mexico, which went into effect that same January 1 when the Zapatista movement declared war on the Mexican Federal Government. Nonetheless there are many less well-known events that happened prior to this uprising, events that invite us to reconsider the origins of the Zapatista National Liberation Army.

Alex Khasnabish, in *Zapatistas: Rebellion from the Grassroots to the Global*, helpfully reminds us that the rebellion in the state of Chiapas was the outcome of decades of violence, exploitation, and racism towards the indigenous population in the region. The subjugation these communities experienced at the hands of political institutions and transnational corporations resulted in them coming together on multiple occasions in hopes of finding liberation. One such more modern gathering that is credited for uniting more than three hundred Mayan communities and inspiring a massive rebellion was The First Indian Congress of 1974, which was backed by a prominent religious figure, Bishop Samuel Ruiz. A result of this event in the mid-1970s, Khasnabish writes, "was a well-organized indigenous movement assisted not only by clergy and church workers but also by radical political activists from urban centers who had fled police and army repression or decided that the countryside would be a more fruitful venue for radical

political organizing."[9] The meaningful conversations that took place during those days continued in the following years and inspired action on the part of the indigenous.

The 1980s were a time of transition for Mexico as a nation, with the governments of Miguel de La Madrid (1982–1988) and Carlos Salinas (1988–1994) adopting a more neoliberal agenda in their politics with the purpose of moving Mexico past the label of third world country. Yet their emphasis on improving the economic infrastructure of the country was only a façade, a ploy to attract international investors, and this action ultimately only exposed the inequalities in Mexican society, particularly among the indigenous population. During this time, the state of Chiapas became the focus of many companies' economic interest due to the many natural resources available there, with Pemex monopolizing the oil developments throughout the Lacandon Jungle at the cost of destroying the ecosystem that for centuries had been home to many indigenous communities.

Also during the 1980s, the state of Chiapas experienced an influx of Maya refugees fleeing the political unrest in Guatemala. Bill Weinberg writes in his book *Homage to Chiapas* that the arrival of these individuals concerned the elite members of Chiapas society, who asked the military to relocate the refugees in order to avoid turning "the rainforest in to a breeding ground for guerrillas."[10] Their actual and greater fear was that the refugees would discourage foreign investors. Ronfeldt and Arquilla point out that

> Chiapas, once an isolated backwater on Mexico's southern border, was becoming awash with outside forces. It was still characterized by tremendous, age-old gaps between the wealthy and impoverished—by privileged landowners who ran feudal fiefdoms with

[9] Alex Khasnabish, *Zapatistas: Rebellion from the Grassroots to the Global* (London: Fernwood Publishing, 2010), 54.

[10] Bill Weinberg, *Homage to Chiapas: The New Indigenous Struggles in Mexico* (London: Verso, 2000), 34.

> private armies, by dictatorial caciques (local bosses), and by plight of poor indigenas (indigenous people) who wanted their lives improved and their cultures respected.[11]

Furthermore, the arrival of international nongovernmental organizations in the region shone a spotlight on the problems in Chiapas, and this only invigorated activists' efforts in reporting the many human rights violations taking place in the region. These complaints certainly put pressure on the Mexican government to address the injustices, but in the end the politicians decided to turn a blind eye to them and pursue their own economic and social engineering agenda, allowing foreign investors to exploit the natural resources in the region.

As the restructuring of the political and economic systems continued around the country, the involvement of the World Bank and other international lenders became noticeable. Feeling the pressure from these various organizations, ultimately the Mexican government decided to reform several laws, allowing foreign investors to take ownership of land. This was a reversal of policies that many people had fought for decades in order to protect national interests. In Chiapas in particular all these changes not only contributed to many indigenous communities being displaced by transnational companies interested in making money from the natural resources of the land; it also led many of the indigenous to organize to fight for jobs that paid fair wages.

Such events and policies prepared the ground for a more militant undertone in the region. Khasnahish recounts that "[i]n the early 1980s, cadres from an urban guerrilla organization entered Chiapas to add the last element necessary to give rise to the Zapatista Army of National Liberation."[12] These insurgents arriving from the north of Mexico were the remainders of the Forces of National Liberation (Fuerzas de Liberacion Nacional, FLN) who came to Chiapas with

[11] David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla, "Emergence and Influence of the Zapatista Social Netwar*," Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy, edited by John Arguilla and David Ronfeldt* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001), 173.

[12] Khasnabish, *Zapatistas: Rebellion from the Grassroots*, 56.

the intention of forming a socialist society. Their influence initiated the conversations that led to the organizing of the Zapatista Army. Several components were falling into place and Chiapas was about to experience a transformation.

The subcomandante Marcos, a prominent spokesperson for the Zapatista National Liberation Army, recounts how the Zapatista movement began on November 17, 1983 with a group of only "five men and one woman. Of those six, three were mestizo and three were indigenous."[13] Prompted by local events, these few individuals engaged in soul searching discussions as they envisioned a better future for their families and communities. Marcos proudly clarifies how the ethnic backgrounds of Zapatista army fighters have shifted drastically since the first meeting back in the early 1980s. Then, only 50 percent of the group were from the indigenous communities while the rest were ladinos activists and intellectuals who had the spirit of insurgency. But as the movement developed, those figures switched to an estimated "98.9 percent indigenous and 1 percent mestizo."[14] Subcomandante Marcos also emphasized the high percentage of indigenous women actively engaged in the movement. Even though subcomandante Marcos' mestizo origins derive from the northern part of Mexico and his upbringing was therefore different than that of most of his comrades, as an intellectual who has been exposed to Marxist ideologies and Maya philosophy he developed a worldview that helped him recognize the struggles of the most vulnerable members of society. He arrived in the region with the intention of teaching in the schools among the different indigenous communities, only

[13] Gloria Muños Ramírez, *The Fire & The Word: A History of the Zapatista Movement* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2008), 21.

[14] Ramírez, *The Fire & The Word*, 21.

to be taught by the "inheritors of the true builders of Mexico"[15] what it means to search for identity in the colonial matrix of power. Subcommandant Marcos said: "It's a process…you begin to take steps—first becoming interested in a situation, then understanding that there is injustice, then trying to understand the roots of the injustice...You begin by helping out in small ways, taking logical steps."[16] Khasnabish highlights subcomandante Marcos' willingness to be taught by members of the most marginalized communities in Mexican society about their ways of life, their history, and their struggles before taking a leadership role in the movement. Khasnabish writes, "It [was] there that the urban and Marxist core of the EZLN came face to face with the indigenous culture and heritage of Chiapas, a confrontation which would force the former to reconfigure and subordinate itself to the latter."[17] During the active brain-storming and planning sessions regarding the future of the indigenous communities in the Lacandon Jungle or as Marcos refers to these formative years, the phase of 'implanataion' of ideas, the government decided to take an active role in dissipating these militant ideologies by carrying out different agricultural initiatives in Chiapas in hopes of lessening the tension in the region. Nonetheless, the greatest beneficiaries of such initiatives were once again land owners rather than the working class, let alone the indigenous people.

The omission of indigenous people from the plans for the transformation of Mexican society peaked under the leadership of the neoliberal government of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Being one of the country's states richest in natural resources, Chiapas became an

[15] Subcomandante Marcos, *Shadows of Tender Fury: The Letters and Communiques of Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995), 54.

[16] John D. Early, *Maya and Catholic Cultures in Crisis* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2012), 309.

[17] Khasnabish, *Zapatistas: Rebellion from the Grassroots*, 56.

environmental battleground between the indigenous communities and major corporations who continued to extract natural resources like oil, gas, lumber as well as precious metals and minerals like gold, silver, uranium, titanium, etc., such extraction leaving in its wake extensive deforestation and polluted rivers (the source of water). The companies also appropriated vast tracts of land, forcing communities to relocate/migrate in order to survive. In response to this sad reality subcomandante Marcos voiced his concern in his famous essay *A Storm and a Prophecy—Chiapas: The Southeast in Two Winds* written in 1992 and published in Mexico's most liberal newspaper La Jornada in January 27, 1994:

> Chiapas loses blood through many veins: through oil and gas ducts, electric lines, railways, through bank accounts, trucks, vans, boats and planes; through clandestine paths, gaps and forest trails. This land continues to pay [literal] tribute to the imperialists: petroleum, electricity, cattle, money, coffee, banana, honey, corn, cacao, tobacco, sugar, soy, melon, sorghum, mamey mango, tamarind, avocado, and Chiapaneco blood all flow as a result of the thousand teeth sunk into the throat of the Mexican Southeast.[18]

As the ambition to become a modern nation grew, the government of Gortari promoted economic agreements with other nations, which resulted in its natural resources being sent abroad, with transnational corporations primarily profiting from this process along with a few wealthy Mexican families. This resulted in the impoverishing of a still higher number of Mayan communities who were left to struggle for their subsistence. Many human rights activists continued to report on the alarming situation developing in Chiapas, but with little success. The rest of Mexico and the international community were not interested. Subcomandante Marcos's raw report on the situation is illuminating here, partly due to his proximity to the crisis and partly due to his ability to paint a more realistic and precise picture of the catastrophic conditions that the Mayan population in the region experienced as second-class citizens:

[18] Subcomandante Marcos, "A Storm and a Prophecy—Chiapas: The Southeast in Two Winds." August 1992. https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/southeast-winds-storm-prophecy/.

> Half of (the rural inhabitants of Chiapas) don't have potable water, and two-thirds have no sew(er)age service. Ninety percent of the rural population pays little or no taxes. Communication in Chiapas is a grotesque joke for a state that produces petroleum, electricity, coffee, wood, and cattle for the hungry beast. Only two-thirds of the municipal seats have paved roads access. Twelve thousand communities have no other means of transport and communication than mountain trails. And education? It is the worst in the country. At the elementary school level, 72 out of every 100 children don't finish the first grade. More than half of the schools only offer up to a third-grade education, and a half of the schools only have one teacher for all the courses offered. There are statistics, although they are kept secret of course, that show that many indigenous children are forced to drop out of school due to their families' need to incorporate them into the system of exploitation. In any indigenous community it is common to see children carrying corn and wood, cooking, or washing clothes during school hours…The health conditions of the people of Chiapas are a clear example of the capitalist imprint: 1.5 million people have no medical services at their disposal. There are 0.2 clinics for every 1,000 inhabitants, one-fifth the national average. There are 0.3 hospital beds for every 1,000 Chiapanecos, one-third the amount in the rest of Mexico. There is one operating room per 100,000 inhabitants, one half of the amount in the rest of Mexico. There are 0.5 doctors and 0.4 nurses per 1,000 people, one-half of the national average.[19]

Subcomandante Marcos' report of the impoverished conditions of these communities exposes the discriminatory treatment towards indigenous people in Mexican society while major institutions continued to profit enormously from their land's resources. The Zapatista National Liberation Army was formed to give voice to the concerns of these communities, which over time have come together and have said to the government, 'Ya Basta!' Enough exploitation and dehumanization in the name of profit, progress, and democracy!

Whereas the modern events mentioned in this introductory section may be seen as the main contributors to the uprising of the Mayan community, I suggest—based on the words uttered in the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle—that there are other past events worth revisiting if we are to understand the ideology that would be promoted with the intention of excluding particular groups of people. The first paragraph of this Manifesto reminds us that the

[19] Marcos, "A Storm and a Prophecy—Chiapas."

Zapatista movement is a "product of five hundred years of struggle: first against slavery; then in the insurgent-led war of Independence against Spain; later in the fight to avoid being absorbed by North American expansion."[20] The five-hundred-year mark cannot be ignored since it was not only the beginning of the modern era but also the start of a colonial period that would pronounce a death sentence on indigenous people around the globe. Many communities would be exterminated, along with their culture and knowledge. Walter Mignolo calls this the "colonization of being," which he explains "is nothing else than producing the idea that certain people do not belong to history—that they are non-beings."[21] In this chapter, I examine what led to this ideology and what role religion played in this period.

My aim for the remainder of this chapter is to revisit some of the events that took place in 1492 in hopes of better understanding the colonial ideology that contributed to the marginalization of the indigenous community in Chiapas today. I begin the first section by discussing the religious ideologies that led to the racial classification used by the colonial powers in the subjugation of the Americas. I argue that the Church interpreted the so-called 'curse of Ham' to promote racial classification that labeled different civilizations and opened the doors for the subjugation of entire continents, beginning with Africa.

In the second section, I explore the significance of the arrival of Europeans in Anahuac and Tawantinsuyu, as the American continent was known to his inhabitants. I begin by dispelling the contention that America was "discovered." I then describe the struggle to categorize the natives of this continent. And finally, I explain how the 'discovery' of a new race contributed to the racial classification used in modern society. In the third section I argue that the Purity of

[20] Marcos, *Shadows of Tender Fury*, 54.
[21] Walter Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin Americ*a (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 4.

Blood Laws and the Inquisition became the legal discriminatory means by which to classify people according to their religious beliefs in the Iberian Peninsula. I also suggest that what happened to the Jews and Muslims at the hands of these laws and the Inquisition was the beginning of the colonial project that would be continued in the New World. In the fourth section, I examine how the Purity of Blood laws were adapted once they were transported to the Spanish colonies and how they resulted in a 'mestizaje' (later a 'castizaje') that gave birth to new groups of people and racial classifications that were imposed on them and used to exclude them from society. I also discuss an important but seldom mentioned topic: the impact of mestizaje on indigenous and African women.

The Curse of Ham and the Early Construction of a Race

Prior to the arrival of Europeans in Anahuac and Tawantinsuyu (as the American continent was originally known by its inhabitants), it was commonly believed that the earth's entire population congregated in three geographical locations. Nevertheless, hundreds of years earlier the ancient Greeks themselves had promoted a view that divided the world into two regions, the west and the east, in reference to where the civilized and the barbarians resided, but that opinion changed when they adopted a revised —tripartite— division of the globe and its peoples that included the continent of Africa. According to renowned Latin American philosopher Enrique Dussel, "the classical Greeks were well aware that both Asia (the area that would later become a province in the Roman Empire and which corresponded to contemporary Turkey) and Africa (Egypt) were home to the most developed cultures. Asia and Africa were not considered barbaric, although neither were they considered wholly human" by the Greeks.[22]

[22] Enrique Dussel, "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism," *Views from the South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 465.

Dussel clarifies that in comparison, the territory which is now associated with Europe (but not including Greece) was then "associated with everything that was considered barbaric."[23] However, these two perspectives would reverse in the fifteenth century when Europe took center stage following the 'discovery of America,' and the label 'barbaric' would be assigned to those with beliefs and physical features that differed from those common in Europe. This new positioning eventually led to the world and its inhabitants being remade in the image of Europe, as if Europeans alone had been given divine attributes and assigned the job of recreating the universe.

Returning to the discussion of how the concept of three continents was developed with specific geographical lines, author Denys Hay reminds us in his book *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea*, that

> the boundaries were at first not absolutely clear: it was debated whether the Nile was the boundary between Asia and Africa or the isthmus of Suez; and for a while the small river Phasis, which flowed into the eastern end of the Black Sea, was regarded as the true boundary between Europe and Asia, before this became established as falling at the Tanais river (Don).[24]

The Romans likewise adopted the notion of three continents, but this had little political significance until the Roman Empire embraced Christianity as its official religion and Rome's theological connotations would influence the geopolitics of its time. According to postcolonial theorist Walter Mignolo, "among all known cosmologies (Islamic, Chinese, Aztec, Inca), Christian cosmology was the only one to conceive the world divided into three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe) and to assign to each continent one of Noah's sons (Japhet, Seth, Ham)."[25]

[23] Dussel, "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism," 465.

[24] Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (San Francisco: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), 2.

[25] Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 130.

Distribution of the three civilizations in the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa to Noah's three sons was inspired by the narrative found in Genesis 9–10.

This passage of Scripture describes a bizarre incident in which a drunk Noah lies naked in his tent, and one of his sons, Ham, walks in on him. Without taking any action (such as covering his father's nakedness), Ham leaves the tent and describes the scene to his two other brothers. For this action or rather inaction in the face of his Noah's vulnerability, Noah curses his son Ham's descendants and praises his other sons for going into the tent right after they receive the report and covering their father's nakedness. In Scripture, Noah is quoted as saying the following about his sons in regard to this event: "Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers…Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave. May God make space for Japhet, and let him live in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave."[26]

At first it seems difficult to understand how these words uttered in anger by an embarrassed patriarch would construct an entire racial classification in modern society and shape the image of the people in an entire continent. However, it is important to remember that these ideas developed over time and at the hands of different religious thinkers until the Christian religion adopted them as dogma and political figures loyal to the Church enforced them. Dennis Hay argues that this allocation of continents to the three sons of Noah began with the ancient

[26] "Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. He drank some of the wind and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japhet took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backwards and covered the covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, 'Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers." He also said, "Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave. May God make space for Japhet, and let him live in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave." Genesis 9:20–28 (New Oxford Annotated Bible).

Jewish scholar Josephus who, in his work *Antiquities of the J*ews written in A.D. 93, highlights where each of Noah's sons settled:

> Japhet, son Noah, had seven sons. These, beginning by inhabiting the mountains of Tauros and Amanus, advanced in Asia up to the river Tanais and in Europe as far as Gadeira, occupying the territory upon which they lit, and, as no inhabitant had preceded them, giving their own names to the nations…The Children of Ham held the countries branching from Syria and the mountain-ranges of Amanus and Libanus occupying all the district in the direction of the sea and appropriating the regions reaching to the ocean… Shem, the third of Noah's sons, had five sons, who inhabited Asia as far as the Indian Ocean, beginning at the Euphrates.[27]

As Hay notes, Josephus attributes to the descendants of Japhet the European continent, to the descendants of Shem the Asian continent, and finally, to the descendants of the Ham the African continent— but with no emphasis on the 'curse of Ham' and the future foretold for them by Noah. Instead, his main intention seems to be "to defend the cultural autonomy of his people, to establish the independent value of Jewish tradition,"[28] and to pinpoint the geographical location to which his ancestors would be assigned. Besides this statement, it seems that for several hundred years no other author used this passage of scripture or expanded on Josephus' remarks to associate the three continents with Noah's three sons.

It was only in the fifth century that Church father St. Augustine took this assignation of three continents and began to construct a racial classification based on it in hopes of demonstrating the superiority of European society. The focus on the term "race" is absent in Augustine's writings since this terminology is much more modern and would begin to be developed only in the fifteenth century. In the latter part of this chapter I will discuss how this concept of 'race' is implemented in the categorization of others and eventually applied to the indigenous population in the Americas.

[27] Hay, *Europe*, 10.
[28] Hay, *Europe*, 10.

In reference to the narrative of Genesis 9–10, St. Augustine writes in *The City of God* how Noah's words were to be taken as a prophetic mandate in which Shem and Japhet would receive a special blessing for covering Noah's nakedness while the descendants of Ham would be cursed and destined for a life of servanthood for Ham ridiculing their father. "Noah commends his sons Shem and Japhet in his prophetic benediction since he knew by prophetic insight, what was to happen in the far distant future."[29] Mignolo argues that Augustine interprets the text by pointing at how this prophecy has been fulfilled through the manifestation of the three continents, perhaps giving an advantage to the European continent, and linking Europe quite explicitly to the 'house of Christ' while denigrating the descendants of Ham with the African continent.

> The name Shem, as we know, means "named" and it was in Shem's line that Christ was born in the flesh. Japheth means "enlargement" and "in the houses of Christ"; that is, the "enlargement" of the nations dwells in the church. The name Ham means "hot" and Noah's middle son was separated from the other two, and by keeping his position between them, [he] was included neither in the first fruits of Israel nor in the full harvest of the Gentiles. He could only stand for the hot breed of heretics: "They are hot because they are on fire not with the spirit of wisdom; but with the spirit of impatience; for that is the characteristic fervor in the hearts of heretics; that is what makes them disturb the peace of the saints.[30]

The 'curse of Ham' became a biblical excuse for dehumanizing an entire continent and gave permission to entire nations to subjugate that continent's inhabitants in search of capital gains. Hay emphasizes that "St. Augustine took the matter further and a further step was taken in the establishment of that fearful tradition which was sometimes to justify in later ages an attitude to the African negroes which precluded them from a full enjoyment of the Christian revelation."[31] Mignolo also argues that St. Augustine's interpretation of this passage was instrumental in the

[29] Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin Americ*a, 27.
[30] Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin Americ*a, 28.
[31] Hay, *Europe*, 12.

racialization of an entire continent, setting the stage for the invention of Africa as a continent and its people as a model that would be later used in the Americas. Other theologians would be influenced by St. Augustine's writings and with time developed theories which described African people as inferior in comparison to (civilized) Europeans. Eventually the Church adopted these ideologies and supported nations that kidnapped and forced free Africans into a life of slavery. As Christianity continued to partner with political institutions, the African continent would find it difficult to erase the level of 'cursed people,' and from one moment to the next their entire history and contributions would be wiped away from all historical records.

Dussel reflects on how the idea of a 'cursed' people shaped politics toward the African continent and led to several centuries of atrocities toward the African people. "Slave traders caged these peasants like beasts and transported them as cargo in boats across the Atlantic. In this cruelest of histories, modernity subjected thirteen million Africans to the treatment by immolating them as a second holocaust for capital."[32] According to another Postcolonial Latin America thinker, Ramon Grosfoguel, the kidnapping of free Africans to be transported to the Americas was a major event because it not only was proof that one nation could subjugate and eradicate an entire population based on a set of religious beliefs and anthropological features, it also showed that one nation had the power to remove all the knowledge and contributions made by that particular community, as if tearing certain pages out of a history book leaving no recollection of those events. Europeans reproduced this practice wherever they set foot. Grosfoguel calls this act of destroying all knowledge an epistemicide. "Africans in the Americas were forbidden from thinking, praying or practicing their cosmologies, knowledges and world

[32] Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of the Other & The Myth of Modernity* (New York: Continuum Intl. Pub Group, 1995), 122.

views. They were submitted to a regime of epistemic racism that forbade their autonomous knowledge production. Epistemic inferiority was a crucial argument used to claim biological social inferiority below the line of human."[33] The genocide and epistemic practices were a result of a biased interpretation of the narrative in Genesis 9 and 10. The 'Curse of Ham' introduced to the world the idea of an inferior civilization. As Africa had been conceived in the image of Christian Europe, so did European Christians conceive Africans' fate to be slaves.

Europe would learn from this project and repeat the act of "remaking" a continent when they "discovered" the American continent centuries later. In fact, Mignolo argues that "The idea of America cannot be understood without the existence, previous to the discovery/invention, of the tripartite division of the world, with the corresponding Christian geo-political connotations"[34] which begin with Africa.

One way in which the 'Curse of Ham' contributed to the racial classification and to the shift of global power is through the important role the Church. For the Church promoted an interpretation of the descendants of Ham linked to the African continent as inferior people. The Church was instrumental for the next five hundred years in reshaping the world and supporting the idea that descendants of Japheth on the other hand would enjoy some privileges that they would continue to use to exert its power and superiority over others. Hay writes how this interpretation began to move Europe to the center stage of civilization. The words uttered by Noah to Japhet and his descendants for a special blessing and to expand its territory would begin to be fulfilled in the fifteenth century:

[33] Ramon Grosfoguel, "Epistemic Racism/Sexism, Westernized Universities and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* XI, no. 1 (Fall 2013): 84.

[34] Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin Amer*ica, 24.

> Europe was the land of Japheth, of the Gentiles, the Greeks and the Christians; Asia was the land of Semitic peoples, glorious in that they had produced the patriarchs and prophets, the chosen people and Christ himself; but—as the land of the circumcised adherents of older laws—condemned to an inferiority which was stated in the scriptures: 'God shall enlarge Japhet and he shall dwell in the tents of Sherm. As for Africa, the lot of the unhappy descendants of Ham, the Hamitic subjection was equally clearly laid down: Canaan was to be the servant both of Shem and Japheth: 'a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren."[35]

The discovery of new lands and its conquest would be interpreted as the fulfillment of the prophecy of 'enlargement' of Japhet's territory.

The "Discovery" of America and the "Invention" of a New Race

The debate about an inferior civilization on the continent of Africa, inspired by the biblical interpretation of Genesis 9 and 10, became more complex once Christopher Columbus landed on the island of Guanahani in the Bahamas on October 22, 1492. At that very moment, Columbus was still unaware of the existence of a fourth continent, and that ignorance continued until his death. Unknown to him, the 'discovery' of a new world would forever alter life for the inhabitants of Anahuac and Tawantinsuyu.

In the centuries to follow, the encounter of two civilizations would be described from different perspectives, depending on who was narrating the event. The natives of Anahuac and Tawantinsuyu perceived the white men with beards coming to their shores as gods returning to earth. In the few remaining records of the Aztec civilization, the meeting of the Spanish conquistadors is portrayed as the return of Quetzalcoatl to save them. Of course the reality was shockingly different. After the Spanish conquistadors' arrival, the Spanish forced the Christian concept of salvation on the natives. Chapter 2 describes the outcomes of this in greater detail.

[35] Hay, *Europe*, 14–15.

The ‘discovery’ of an entirely unknown population created a heated discussion in the theological and political realms of European society for years. After his encounter with the native population, Columbus referred to this population as ‘Indians.’ This label shows Columbus’ ignorance of where he had arrived. He thought he had discovered a faster sea passage to India—a benefit for trade from Europe. This fact should help us dissipate the myth that for centuries has been endorsed: the ‘discovery’ of America. Walter Mignolo reminds us that until the sixteenth century, “[p]eople in Europe, in Asia, and in Africa had no idea of the landmass soon to be called the Indias Occidentales and then America, or of all the people inhabiting [who] would be called Indians.”[36] Nevertheless, that Europeans were unaware of the existence of these civilizations in Mesoamerica does not mean these civilizations’ identities and histories prior to the arrival of Columbus should be ignored. Nevertheless, Europeans used the blueprint applied to the African continent and invented the identity of the ‘new’ continent. V.Y. Mudimbe in his book *The Idea of Africa* writes about the similarities in the European approach to both Africa and the American continent: “America falls in the same abject category as Africa: she is barbaric, out of proportion, has strange fauna. Her inhabitants are superstitious and idolatrous pagans.”[37] Europeans applied a similar strategy to address the “barbaric” and “idolatrous pagans” on this new continent.

The Spanish crown had made it a priority to discover a faster route to India before the Portuguese did since they knew that whoever found this trading route would “acquire nautical knowledge, amass gold, win honor, and expand the Christian faith. ”[38] Tzvetan Todorov argues that while Columbus was certainly in search of gold and honor, his priority was religiously

[36] Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin Americ*a, 2.
[37] V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 9.
[38] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 28.

motivated: he expected to arrive in Asia and meet Grand Khan in order to convert him to his faith. Thus, "infinitely more than gold, the spread of Christianity is Columbus's heart desire, and he has set forth his feelings in the case very explicitly, notably in a letter to the pope."[39] When Columbus first saw land, he baptized that territory by the name 'Indias Occidentales.' He died in 1506 thinking he had indeed found a faster route to Asia.

The name Indias Occidentales morphed into America when Italian sailor, Amerigo Vespucci realized that the stars showed he was in a different part of world (today's Brazil) not Asia at all. Enrique Dussel describes the incident like this, "The story is well known that since Vespucci conceptually 'discovered' (in the sense of 'discovering for oneself' or 'realizing') that Europeans were confronting a New World, the continent was renamed 'America' after Amerigo Vespucci himself—with a slight change to the ending to make it fit with the already existing non-European continents, Africa and Asia."[40] Returning to this event, which marked a new direction in modern history, Todorov writes from the European perspective that "the discovery of America, or of the Americans, is certainly the most astonishing encounter of our history. We do not have the same sense of radical difference in the "discovery" of other continents and of other peoples: Europeans have never been altogether ignorant of the existence of Africa, India or China; some memory of these places was always there already—from the beginning."[41] Mignolo would argue differently by focusing on how the narrative of the "discovery" negates hundreds of years of history from the natives of these lands, whose history according to Europeans "begins" in 1492. "America,' as we know it, was an invention forged in the process of European colonial

[39] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), 11.

[40] Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin Americ*a, 3.

[41] Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, 4.

history and the consolidation and expansion of the Western world view and institutions. The narratives that described the events as 'discovery' were told not by the inhabitants of Anahuac or Tawantinsuyu, but by Europeans themselves."[42] Whatever records existed from these ancient civilizations prior to this historical encounter were destroyed to enforce the myth of the discovery.

The event is important because it set the course for the modern era. For what took place after the Europeans' arrival would contribute to a more complete racial classification by incorporating the inhabitants of the new continent. Columbus had left Spain on September 8 and encountered the first mass of land on October 12, 1492. Thinking he had arrived on the Asian continent he wrote the following in his diary:

> The information that I have given to your Highnesses about the lands of India, about a leader called Great Khan (which means in our Romance language "king of kings"), and about the repeated requests by him and his ancestors that Rome send teachers of our holy faith….Your Highnesses, as Catholic and Christians, the chief lovers of the holy Christian faith…and enemies of the sect of Mohammed…have thought to send me, Christopher Columbus, to these parts of India to see these leaders and their peoples and land and, above all (to understand) how we might convert them to our holy faith.[43]

Columbus subsequently made other trips, and while he continued to search for material gains for the Spanish crown, he also persisted in the evangelization of what he thought was the Asian continent.

The 'discovery' of the fourth continent would be another "Christian invention" that with time was adopted as a worldwide view. As happened on the African continent once it was "invented" by Christian Europe, so too the civilizations in Tawantinsuyu and Anahuac were exterminated and their contributions in history erased. Mignolo reaffirms,

[42] Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin Americ*a, 2.
[43] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 29.

> It was as if they had not existed before, and only began to do so at the very moment of their disappearance (invasion) that is to say, they lost their autonomous history. From the beginning of the sixteenth century onward the histories and languages of Indian communities "became historical" at the point where they lost their own history.[44]

Their adulteration by European thinkers was so pervasive, it would be a difficult task to uncover the epistemologies of these civilizations.

As Europe begin to assimilate the expansion of the known earth with the addition of a fourth continent, the question remained of how to categorize the inhabitants of this geographical region if they were not Europeans, Asians, or Africans. Until this point, civilizations had not categorized the "humans" based on "race" since it "was a concept that referred to lineage, particularly applied to horses."[45] It was not until centuries later that 'race' became the chief means of identifying humans. The Greek and Roman civilizations classified people according to two categories, the civilized and the barbarous. According to George M. Fredrickson, these two categories did not have anything to do with heritage. Rather, "one was civilized if one was fortunate enough to live in a city-state and participate in political life, barbarous if one lived rustically under some form of despotic rule."[46] Santiago Slabodsky, writing on the origins of barbarism in his book *Decolonial Judaism*, also links the concept to civility but expands by saying, "the barbarian was defined in incommensurable opposition to civilization and associated with the rejection of natural law and the perpetration of political, sexual, and economical perversions."[47] Slabodsky says that for ancient Greeks, the barbarians were those who belonged

[44] Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin Americ*a, 26.

[45] Walter D. Mignolo, "Islamophobia/Hispanophobia: The (Re)Configuration of the Racial Imperial/Colonial Matrix," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* V, no. 1 (Fall 2006): 18.

[46] George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 17.

[47] Santiago Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism: Triumphal Failures of Barbaric Thinking* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 25.

to the Persian Empire, and later the Romans would place this label on people who didn't assimilate the way of the empire, like the Germania. When the invasion of the Ottoman Empire confronted the medieval European world, the title was transferred to Muslims. Once Europe began to expand its influence over other civilizations, the barbaric term came "to denote colonized populations including (but not limited to) those found in Atlantic locations such as Natives and Latin Americans, Africans and Blacks, Muslims and Arabs, and finally Israelites (not Israelis) and Jews."[48]

Prompted by Christopher Columbus' description of the indigenous population in Americas, the term 'barbaric' came to be applied to the natives of the fourth continent. Decades later in a 1550 debate against Bartolome De Las Casas in Valladolid, excusing the Spanish crown from all atrocities committed in the New World, Spanish theologian Juan Gines de Sepulveda argued, "This war and conquest are just first of all because these barbaric, uneducated, and inhuman (Indians) are by nature servants."[49] His argument was based on the earlier definition of barbarism. He wrote:

> Naturally, they refuse the governance which more prudent, powerful, and perfect human beings offer and which would result in their great benefit (magnas commoditates). By natural right and for the good of all (utriusque bene), the material ought to obey the form, the body the soul, the appetite the reason, the brutes the human being, the woman her husband, the imperfect the perfect, and the worse the better.[50]

Aristotle's conception of natural slavery heavily influenced Sepulveda's arguments. Aristotle believed that 'Indians' were not rational beings and since they therefore were incapable of

[48] Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism*, 25.

[49] Michael McKinley, *Economic Globalisation as Religious War: Tragic Convergence* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 187.

[50] McKinley, *Economic Globalisation,* 187.

making decisions on their own, they were not humans and were divinely destined to a life of slavery.

While many would praise Bartolome De Las Casas for defending the 'Indians' by saying they were indeed capable of reasoning and had their own form of governance, even if it was different than what was practiced in Europe, Las Casas continued to use the term 'barbarian' influenced in part by Aristotelian logic. In fact, in his work *Apologetica Historia Sumaria* (1552), Las Casas proposed for Europeans a ranking of five kinds of barbarians so that they could establish a hierarchy of being, specifically as regards the inhabitants of the Americas. The first type of barbarian reflected the individual's behavior. "Las Casas believed that some peoples, once rational rules and generosity were forgotten, would fall into ferocious behavior and forget the generous and cordial manners (blandura y mansedubre) that should characterize all civilized human social behavior."[51] The second kind of barbarian was assessed by language. Those who did not speak the Latin languages (who included Muslims, Jews, Africans, and Indians) fell into this category of barbarity. So too did "all those people who lacked the practice and study of 'letters of poetry, rhetoric, logic, history, and every aspect of knowledge called 'literature' in the broadest sense of the word."[52] The third type of barbarians had to do with their type of governmental system, which was not an issue for the "Indians," according to what Las Casas had observed. The fourth category had to do with religion or the lack of it. Las Casas argued that those who lacked the Christian faith should be considered barbarians. This category once again included the communities of Muslims, Jews, Africans and 'Indians.' Finally, Las Casas' fifth kind of barbarians he called '*barbarie contraria*.' These included civilizations that actively

[51] Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin Americ*a, 18.
[52] Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin Americ*a, 18.

"worked to undermine Christianity."[53] No particular group is mentioned in this category but one can imagine that anyone who resisted the teachings of the Catholic Church would be labeled a '*barbarie contraria*.'

Las Casas' classification of five types of barbarians is a major contribution to the construction of the racial classification that would be implemented in modern society, even if his typology says nothing about a person's skin color. Mignolo maintains that Las Casas' classification is racial because "it ranked human beings in a top-down scale assuming the ideals of Western Christians as the criteria and measuring stick for the ranking. Racialization does not simply say, "You are Black or Indian, therefore you are inferior. Rather, it says, you're not like me, therefore you are inferior."[54] These concepts of racialization though first promoted in the colonial world to this day continue to be applied to the indigenous communities in Mexico.

The words Christopher Columbus wrote in his diary on landing on the American continent in 1492 and on making contact with a group of indigenous people, previewed racializing ideas to come: "Ellos andad todos desnudos como su madre los pario…Y yo crei e creo que aqui vienen de tierra firme a tomarlos por captivos.. Ellos deven ser buen servidores y de buen igenio, que veo que muy presto dizen todo que les dezia.. Y creo que ligeramente se harian christianos, que me parecio que ninguna secta tenian."[55] His words were debated for decades and had a lasting impact on the future identity of the people. In his journal entry,

[53] Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin Americ*a, 20.

[54] Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin Americ*a, 17.

[55] "They all go naked as their mothers bore them…I supposed and still supposed that they come from the mainland to capture them for slaves. They should be good servants and very intelligent, for I have observed that they soon repeat anything that is said to them, and I believe that they would be easily be made Christians, for they appeared to me to have no religion." Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Religion, Conquest, and Race in the Foundations of the Modern/Colonial World," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 3 (September 2014): 638, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfu054.

Columbus highlights the fact that these natives can be good servants and also that they can be converted to Christianity since they do not already have a religion. Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues that this statement shows that Columbus clearly viewed them as blank slates, since at that time it was customary to categorize people by their religious affiliation. The idea that indigenous people were a blank slate and that it was "possible to write anything on their consciousness because they were empty, or lacked substance"[56] is not original to Columbus of the Spanish people but had long been part of Greek ideology that had influenced the way Europeans categorized 'others.'

In his article 'Islamophobia/Hispanophobia: The (Re)Configuration of the Racial Imperial/Colonial Matrix,' Mignolo identifies a system of classification used in the Iberian Peninsula during the time of Columbus in which individuals were categorized based on their belief system. This categorization was influenced by Christian theology, which obviously favored those who upheld the teachings of the Church. Nevertheless, Jews and Muslims were classified in the category of 'idolatrous' for worshiping the wrong God. In the 'Discovery' of the Americas, since the spiritual traditions of the indigenous people were not validated, a new category was endorsed—the people with 'no religion.'

Having "no religion" was tantamount to saying they had "no humanity." That made it an easy step to categorize them as colonial subjects, and to treat them inhumanely. This categorization of the indigenous population in the Americas predetermined the treatment of the indigenous people in modern day Mexico—and more specifically in Chiapas—to which I now turn.

[56] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Religion, Conquest, and Race in the Foundations of the Modern/Colonial World," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 3 (September 2014): 639, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfu054.

Iberian Roots of American Racism and Limpieza de Sangre

The fifteenth century was not only the era of "discovery" of a "new" land and people. Back in Europe, something significant had taken place that altered the way society classified people henceforth, not only in the Americas but around world. In Spain in particular this era is often referred to as 'La Reconquista,' a European invention that excuses the genocide and mass appropriation of land from Muslim and Jewish communities. Following Mignolo, I prefer to name this period the era of the '(Re)Configuration of the Imperial/Colonial Matrix' (based on Mignolo's own words) since this best describes the construction of a new system that came to dominate the modern world. In this section, I show how the Purity of Blood Laws and the Inquisition became the legal but discriminatory means to classify people according to their religious beliefs. I suggest that what happened to the Jews and Muslims at the hands of these laws was the beginning of the colonial project that continued in the New World.

This era begins with the common understanding that Muslims arrived on the European continent seven hundred years before the construction of the Christian European project. It would be inaccurate to say that Muslims conquered the region since there was no all-encompassing military campaign that took over the different countries, since the concept of nation-state as we know it did not exist and there was scarcely any resistance coming from the native population. It's important to emphasize that while Muslims did not force conversation to Islam in the area, nevertheless their lifestyle was influential in European society.

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, there were roughly 5.5 million Muslims in Spain. That changed significantly in only a few years, for religion played an important role in the shift of power in the fifteenth century in Western Europe and the decline of the Muslim population. Mignolo writes, "The conflict between Christianity and Islam became more focused

in the Iberian Peninsula. The rapid rise of Castile from a Kingdom to a world and capitalist empire re-mapped the long history of conflicts between Muslims and Christians."[57] Matthew Carr in his book *Blood and Faith: The Purging of Muslim Spain*, describes the perception of Christian Europe on the Muslim faith as conceiving of "Islam …not [as] a religion but [as] a delusional 'sect,' a 'pestilential virus,' and an 'insult to God,' whose followers were regarded as pagans, heretics, idol-worshipers, or 'stone worshippers'—a reference to the Kaaba stone at Mecca."[58] Besides the 'erroneous' system of belief attributed to Muslims, European Christians perceived Muslims as irrational beings due to them failing to accept the 'Christian God.' Christians had questioned Muslims' way of life and their traditions and had labeled them as barbarians, as they did other civilizations that did not assimilate to European ways, such as Africans, Jews, Muslims, and also the natives of the American continent with time. Bartolome De Las Casas wrote regarding the Muslims' way of life, "The Moors are known for their tendency to let go and engage in base and lascivious pleasures; the Turks are inclined to the abominable vice (sodomy) as well as other ignominious vileness, although it is said that they surpass us in everything related to justice and government."[59] At that time, Europeans natives recognized the advancements in many areas of life that Muslim civilization brought to the Iberian Peninsula, even though much of that has long since been forgotten. For example, Carr describes the Golden Age advancements in Cordoba, the center of al-Andalus, which far surpassed those of the rest of Europe:

> At its peak in the tenth century, Cordoba was a metropolis without parallel in the Christian world, boasting paved roads and streetlights, hospitals, schools, public baths, and libraries. At a time when the largest Library in Christian Europe had no more than six

[57] Mignolo, "Islamophobia/Hispanophobia," 15.
[58] Matthew Carr, *Blood and Faith: The Purging of Muslim Spain* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 13.
[59] Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin Amer*ica, 19.

> hundred volumes, a cottage industry of Arabic calligraphers in Cordoba was churning out some sixty thousand hand written books every year, and the libraries of the bibliophile Umayyad caliph al-Hakeam, the majestic, learned, and administrative, were said to contain some four hundred thousand manuscripts on a variety of subjects from poetry and theology to philosophy, medicine, and agriculture.[60]

Muslims had lived in the Iberian Peninsula for centuries, but after the monarchy in Spain gained power and partnered with the Church, those who did not follow the same religion were perceived as enemies of the Christian faith and also of European civilization. Eduardo Galeano in his book *Open Veins of Latin America* best summarizes the role of religion in this important event by arguing that beyond the political interest, this conflict was a "holy war, a Christian war against Islam; and it was no accident that in that same year of 1492, 150,000 Jews were expelled from the country. Spain achieved unity and reality as a nation wielding swords with the Sign of the Cross on their hilts."[61] This was the moment at which Christianity gained ground over Islam and Judaism, and became the official religion of the state.

Although there has been an emphasis on the conflict of Christianity and Islam, one must not forget there had been several centuries of 'coexistence' or 'convivencia' between the religious traditions of Christians, Muslims, and Jews. That started to change at the end of the twelfth century when a wave of anti-Semitic attacks was seen in major cities throughout the Iberian Peninsula, resulting in the catastrophic deaths of thousands of Jews. María Elena Martínez in her book *Genealogical Fictions* reminds us that this type of violence had happened before but that things started escalating at the end of the fourteenth century when an economic crisis swept the region, a crisis for which Christians blamed the Jewish community.

> Faced with the possibility of becoming the targets of angry Christian mobs once again and subject to a growing number of professional, economic, residential, and sumptuary restrictions, tens of thousands of Jews felt compelled to accept baptism. Conversion

[60] Carr, *Blood and Faith*, 3.
[61] Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America*, 12.

> implied assimilation into the dominant society, for it made them eligible for public and ecclesiastical offices and allowed them to live outside of Jewish quarters (Juderías) and to stop wearing distinctive clothing.[62]

Jews who accepted baptism where labeled as *conversos* or *marranos*. The Spanish translation of *marranos* is 'pig' but Robert Aleksander Maryks argues that since the Hebrew word *mara* means 'to rebel,' the word *marranos* refers to "those rebellious, contumacious, disobedient, and ambiguous men who under the name of Christianity are still attached to Judaism."[63] If they could only abandon their 'false' teachings and accept Christ, they would be redeemed as a nation and fully integrated in to Christian Europe, was the argument.

In spite of popular opinion, the official stand of the Church was that *conversos* had full rights in Spanish society. Pope Paul III had issued a bull titled *Cupientes Iudaeas* in which he wrote that by abandoning their faith and accepting the sacrament of baptism, Jews could be part of the family of God and receive the same privileges than Christian Europeans,

> we stipulate by this decree that (the converted Jews) of the cities and places, where they are regenerated by holy baptism, must enjoy the same privileges, exemptions, and liberties that other (Christians) receive based on their birth and origin alone.[64]

Alonso de Cartagena, the Bishop of Cartagena who had been baptized early in his childhood by his *converso* father, Shlomo ha-Levi/Pablo de Santa Maria, former chief rabbi of Burgos, likewise insisted that, "Christ saved both Jews and Gentiles, they are united as one people by virtue of regenerative baptism."[65] Yet according to Slabodsky the sacrament of baptism did not transform the perception of others towards the Jewish community. "Conversion…[did] not save

[62] María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 27.

[63] Robert Aleksander Maryks, *The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews: Jesuits of Jewish Ancestry and Purity-of-Blood Laws in the Early Society of Jesus* (Boston: Brill, 2010), 37, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w8h1xm.8.

[64] Maryks, *The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews*, 37.

[65] Maryks, *The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews*, 9.

them from permanent suspicion, continuous surveillance, and especially, socio-economic enslavement or servitude."[66] Interestingly, the scrutiny of the Jewish converts did not come from the government officials but from "the traditional Christians— 'Old Christians' (Christian viejos),"[67] a term used to distinguish the "original" Spanish Christians from the new converts, who suspected that the conversions of so-called 'New Christians' were inauthentic and that they continued to practice Judaism behind closed doors. Sponsored by the Church, an agency called 'probanza de liempieza de sangre' was appointed, and a purity certification process was developed to investigate and hold accountable this community. The Purity of Blood laws allowed a full examination of the *conversos* genealogy to clarify their true religious identity since there was a common belief that "'Jewishness' was transmitted in the blood."[68] This thorough investigation was endorsed by the Church, which insisted that it was necessary to protect the Christian faith, but actually mainly promoted the superiority of Spanish ancestry.

With time, the Purity of Blood Laws was used to classify ethnicity rather than belief. If the Purity of Blood Laws were an excuse to investigate the authenticity of the conversion of Jews, the Inquisition was an excuse to punish those "guilty" of holding on to any religious tradition outside of Christianity.

After the fall of Granada in 1492 and the expulsion of the last Muslim political figure of the Iberian Peninsula, Christians likewise gave Spanish Muslims the choice of adopting Christianity, being killed, or being deported. Those Muslims who accepted baptism into the Christian faith were called *Moriscos* but in spite of the religious transformation that occurred in their lives, Slabodsky reminds us that "Conversos/Marranos (former Jews) along with ex-Muslim

[66] Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism*, 26.
[67] Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 27.
[68] Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 28.

Moriscos were unable to shed their alleged immutable features according to *Pureza de Sangre* (Purity of Blood) legislation and the Inquisition."[69] The Purity of Blood laws gave legal authority to the state, in this case the Crown of Spain, to monitor entire communities who 'appeared' different than those of European descent, even though the original intent was to maintain religious purity. Such monitoring became a racist project, a blueprint used by colonial powers to subjugate different communities around the world.

Ramon Grosfoguel claims that the "'Purity of Blood' was a discourse used to surveil the converts or descendants of the converts. It referred to the 'family tree' [which] provided to state authorities the information needed in order to know if the ancestry of an individual or a family was 'purely' Christian or 'non-Christian' in the case they were Christian converts."[70] While this discourse never called into question the humanity of Muslims and Jews, at least in Europe, when the 'Purity of Blood' discourse was taken to the New World, it morphed to deal with an entirely new category of people.

In the Iberian Peninsula, the focus of these laws helped classify *Marranos* and *Moriscos* according to their religious beliefs, but with the 'discovery' of America the debate become more complex since 'Indians' had "no religion," in the words of Cristopher Columbus.[71] The debate of 'no religion' would be solved with evangelization methods (see chapter 2). Nevertheless, it is safe to conclude that religion didn't save the natives from being categorized as subhuman.

[69] Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism*, 2.

[70] Grosfoguel, "Epistemic Racism/Sexism," 84.

[71] "They all go naked as their mothers bore them…I supposed and still supposed that they come from the mainland to capture them for slaves. They should be good servants and very intelligent, for I have observed that they soon repeat anything that is said to them, and I believe that they would be easily be made Christians, for they appeared to me to have no religion." Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Religion, Conquest, and Race in the Foundations of the Modern/Colonial World," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 3 (September 2014): 638, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfu054.

As the direct result of the Purity of Blood laws and of the Inquisition, the latter, as Maria Elena Martínez writes, being "a tribunal set up to investigate charges of heresy among Christians and in particular among Conversos,"[72] there would be a drastic decrease in the Muslim and Jewish populations. In *Blood and Faith*, Carr estimates a decrease in the Muslim population at the end of the fifteenth century from 5.5 million to 500,000.[73] The impact was catastrophic not only for these communities of faith but for the whole of Spain since until then Spaniards were largely unaware of how intertwined Muslims were with Spanish society. For the Jewish population, Carr documents the pressure that the Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, faced from Spanish citizens to exterminate all Jews in the kingdom. With the fall of the last Muslim political authority in the Andalusian territory, on March 31, 1492 the Catholic monarchs issued a decree both prohibiting all Christian interaction with the Jewish population and mandating that Jews covert or leave Spanish territory within three months—the time allowed to finish pending business transactions, pay their debts, and sell their property. "The proclamation of this edict in April caused consternation and despair among the Jewish population of Castile and Aragon. As many as 50,000 Jews chose to convert, including the leading Jewish rabbi and royal treasurer Abraham Senior. Between 100,000 and 150,000 Jews preferred to go into exile rather than abandon their faith,"[74] writes Carr. Those who were obliged to go into exile, because of logistics and the deadline were forced to leave everything they had behind. This heartbreaking act was repeated as this colonial project continued in other geographical locations. The land

[72] Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 33.

[73] According to some estimates, the Muslim population of Iberia at the beginning of the twelfth century, including Berbers, Arabs, and indigenous converts to Islam, may have been as high as 5.5 million. At the end of the fifteenth century, the number of Muslims in Spain was probably between 500,000 and 600,000 out of a Spanish population of roughly 7 to 8 million." Carr, *Blood and Faith*, 39.

[74] Carr, *Blood and Faith*, 35.

appropriated by the Spanish crown and the wealth left behind does not equal in value the memories the Jews in exile left behind. For them and their children, Spain was all they knew; it was truly the land of their birth. Since the Jews had been there for many generations, this attack and forceful relocation was an act of violence against the natives of the land. In *Discourse on Colonialism*, legendary Martinican thinker Aimé Césaire shares his critique of this ongoing project that took five hundred years to develop. When those sympathizers for all the benefits brought to new continents, Césaire instead reminds of the true reality of their actions. "I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out…I am talking about millions of (women and) men torn from their gods, their land, their habits, their life—from life, from the dance, from wisdom."[75] While in this reflection Césaire is referring to the experience of Africans and the Indigenous population in the Americas at the hands of European powers, surely it is true also of Jews and Muslims on the fifteenth-century Iberian Peninsula.

It is difficult to know precisely to where each of these Jewish families relocated after being sent into exile, but there is enough documentation to indicate that many found a home in North Africa, courtesy of the local Muslim population. Regarding the decision by the Spanish monarch physically to remove an entire population, Carr notes that "Ferdinand himself described the removal of the Jews as a selfless gesture that was intended to protect the Conversos 'despite the great harm to ourselves, seeking and preferring the salvation of souls above our profit and

[75] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1955), 43.

that of individuals."[76] In reality, the removal profited the Spanish Crown and presumably contributed indirectly to the funding of the discovery of the New World.

Ramon Grosfoguel in his article, "Epistemic Racism/Sexism, Westernized Universities and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century," describes the Spanish Crown's action towards Muslims and Jews as a "physical genocide and cultural genocide." Grosfoguel calls the killing and the forceful removal of entire populations from their own land 'settler colonialism.' This method as later applied to the indigenous population in the Americas, continues today in the United States, Israel, and even the south of Mexico. The Spanish genocide also caused an epistemicide in the Iberian Peninsula against Muslim and Jews.

> The massive destruction of Islamic and Judaic spirituality and knowledge through genocide, led to the forced conversion (cultural genocide) of those Jews and Muslims who decided to stay in the territory. By turning Muslims into Moriscos (converted Muslims) and Jews into Marranos (converted Jews) their memory, knowledge and spirituality were destroyed (cultural genocide). The latter was a guarantee that future descendants of Marranos and Mors will be born fully Christian without any memory trace to their ancestors.[77]

Grosfoguel give us a glimpse of the destruction of knowledge that took place in the Iberian Peninsula when he mentions that entire libraries were destroyed to appease the concern of heretical ideology infiltrating Christian Spain, like the one in Cordoba, which had 500,000 books in comparison to the largest Christian library, which had 1,000. After the fall of Granada, 250,000 books were burned in the public square at the command of Church leaders. These methods of domination practiced in the Iberian Peninsula in the fifteenth century were replicated with the help of the Church and the military against the indigenous population in Anáhuac and Tawantinsuyu. We could say it was a 'test run' for the colonial project in the New World.

[76] Carr, *Blood and Faith*, 37.
[77] Grosfoguel, "Epistemic Racism/Sexism," 78.

Grosfoguel writes, "Genocide and epistemicide went together in the process of conquest in both the Americas and Al-Andalus."[78] The arrival of the Spaniards in the Americas had an immediate impact that reflected the physical and cultural genocide produced in Spain. Entire communities were exterminated and their way of life, knowledge, forms of spirituality, and memory were erased from the history books. Just as happened with the burning of libraries in Al-Andalus, the Spanish burned or otherwise destroyed all the 'códice' or codices that were the Amerindians' written forms of record. It was as if the Amerindians had never existed. Sadly, this was the goal of the colonial project that started with Muslims and Jews. Almost five hundred years later, Franz Fanon explained the ultimate goal of coloniality in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, based on the historical actions taken by European powers in African and the Americas. "Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverse logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it."[79] The following chapter further explains this concept of coloniality; for now, it is important to remember that what occurred in the conquest of Al-Andalus was a blueprint for what was to come for other civilizations.

Purity of Blood and 'Castizaje' in the Americas

The fall of Granada was critical for the beginning of the age of 'discovery.' Although Columbus' proposal to cross the Atlantic in search of a faster route to Asia had been approved, Ferdinand and Isabella had ordered Columbus to wait until the defeat of every Muslim political power in the Iberian Peninsula. For now, the primary goal was to unify the whole territory under one authority. The Purity Blood laws and the Inquisition had provided an outline for the project

[78] Grosfoguel, "Epistemic Racism/Sexism," 80.
[79] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), 61.

that later came to fruition in the New World. Columbus set sail on August 3, 1492, and the rest is history. Grosfoguel argues that 'the methods of colonization and domination used against Al-Andalus were extrapolated to the Americas,"[80] perhaps with some modifications. After the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Spanish territory, the rulers had appropriated their land and wealth to fund what would be the most impactful event of the modern era. While the invasions of European powers in different territories gave us a glimpse of the construction of this colonial enterprise, Dussel argues that "Latin America was the first colony of modern Europe since Europe constituted it as its first periphery before Africa and Asia."[81] It is almost as if until the arrival of Spaniards in the New World, everything prior had just been practice for the brutality to come.

In this section, I explore how the Purity of Blood Laws instituted in the Iberian Peninsula in the fifteenth century were applied to the natives of the Americas at the times of the 'discovery,' with perhaps some variations due to the fluidity of population. The changes made from the original project in Spain led to 'Castizaje,' a term introduced by Joseph Sanchez that describes the racial mixture that happened in the Spanish colonies. This 'castizaje' (from 'casta' plus 'mestizaje') resulted in racial hierarchy instituted by Europeans to classify others and to validate their superiority as a race. While 'castizaje' created a more diverse population in the Americas, it unfortunately also led to social exclusion, which continues to be experienced now, five hundred years later, by the indigenous communities in Mexico. It was against this that the Zapatista National Liberation Army fought.

[80] Grosfoguel, "Epistemic Racism/Sexism," 79.
[81] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas,*46.

In reference to the events in the Iberian Peninsula, author Ben Vinson III argues that the project of "Limpieza de sangre provided a useful, albeit incomplete, guide for answering these questions by offering a basic set of religious principles to help think through the implications of racial mixture."[82] While it was effective in scrutinizing the lives of Conversos and Moriscos in Andalusia, as it seeks to maintain purity of the Christian faith, nevertheless, when brought to the New World, this project flopped and needed to be adjusted based on two factors. The first one was that there were no Jews or Muslims in any Spanish colonies since they were not allowed to cross the Atlantic to pervert other civilizations. This factor is important because 'limpieza de sangre' was instituted with these two particular populations in mind. The second reason why the original project of Purity of Blood had to be modified was due to the erroneous perception that indigenous people did not have a religion. Columbus' description of people with "no gods" had created a new category that was debated in European society. By stating that "they appeared to me to have no religion," Columbus assumed that they were a blank slate, leading to him using purity of blood categories to classify individuals based on anthropological attributes as opposed to theological arguments. "Since the indigenous people were subjects without religion, Columbus did not need to resort to the established parameters of the encounters with idolaters and 'false religions' to indicate how he should interact with them."[83] Maldonado-Torres affirms that Columbus "opened the door to the epistemological and symbolic universe which would lead to a fundamental loss of centrality for Christianity and give birth to 'modern man.'"[84]

[82] Ben Vinson III, *Before Mestizaje: The Frontiers of Race and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 47.

[83] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Religion, Conquest, and Race in the Foundations of the Modern/Colonial World," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 3 (September 2014): 639, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfu054.

[84] Maldonado-Torres, "Religion, Conquest, and Race," 652.

Now that religion was not the central means of classifying people, the project of Purity of Blood "meant not to have any mixture of castas."[85] The origins of the term 'casta' is linked to "breeding and lineage, emphasizing taintless purity." Originally it referred to the pedigree of horses in Spain, but with time it morphed to emphasize the crossbreeding of people. Castas would forever be associated with the colonial project first implemented in the New World. Vinson writes regarding this transformation,

> When transplanted to the Americas, the term's meaning shifted somewhat, referring to the offspring of individuals who were produced by miscegenation. All racially mixed individuals, regardless of hue, were collectively known as castas. Although the concept of casta continued to emphasize breeding and lineage in the New World, the original positive connotations that were associated with it in sixteenth-century Spain gradually faded as colonial elites began viewing segments of the mixed-race population with disdain and as they consequently began assigning inferiority to certain phenotypes.[86]

The irony of the scorn Spaniards showed towards mestizos (and particularly indigenous women) was that it was forcibly and inevitable acts to meet their sexual gratification even when indigenous women were not seen as fully humans. Unfortunately, this would be the pattern done in all the colonies towards indigenous women. I would like to clarify how the lack of Spanish women played a factor in the mestizaje but it was not an excuse for committing atrocities towards non-European women. Vinson recounts that "between 1509 and 1539 women represented just 5 to 6 percent of white immigrants to the Spanish Indies. Even as the colonies matured, white female immigration remained low,"[87] leaving Spanish men to take indigenous women as mistresses or simply rape them in order to meet their own needs. Again, these circumstances do not justify the savagery done to women, which would result in the mestizaje.

[85] Vinson, *Before Mestizaje*, 54.
[86] Vinson, *Before Mestizaje*, 38–39.
[87] Vinson, *Before Mestizaje*, 5.

During the Inquisition, Europe had demonstrated its capacity to wage violence against Indo-European women, particularly women who had particular knowledge that made them leaders in their communities. That knowledge gave them power, power that was a threat to the Catholic Church and those it influenced, who therefore persecuted and killed the "offending" women. In this genocide/epistemicide, writes Grosfoguel, "Millions of women were burned alive, accused of being witches in the Early Modern period. Given their authority and leadership, the attack against these women was a strategy to consolidate Christian-centric patriarchy and to destroy autonomous communal forms of ownership. The inquisition was at the forefront of this offensive."[88] Similar to the result of the Purity of Blood laws and the Inquisition, with respect to Muslims and Jews, where the burning of entire libraries created an epistemology, the burning of women's bodies can be considered a genocide and an epistemicide because in this particular case there were no books since the knowledge had been transmitted "from generation to generation through oral tradition. The books were the women's bodies and, thus similar to the Andalusian and Indigenous 'books' their bodies were burned alive."[89] Across the Atlantic, the Catholic Church with the help of the state extended the Spanish Inquisition to target those with different political and religious ideologies and continued to make women the target with the excuse that their ancestral knowledge was nothing but witchcraft.

In the Spanish colonies, the violence towards women was magnified by the subjugation of their bodies resulting in mestizaje. Compared to the concept of 'limpieza de Sangre' in Iberian Peninsula, the emphasis was less theological and more anthropological, but it continued to target people by gender. Historical records indicate that Indigenous women were used to satisfy the

[88] Grosfoguel, "Epistemic Racism/Sexism," 85.
[89] Grosfoguel, "Epistemic Racism/Sexism," 86.

erotic desires of the Spaniards conquistadors with no regard to their consent, age, or civil status. "Indian women were compelled to act against their own will, married women against their husband's will, young girls, ten and fifteen years-old, against the will of their parents."[90] Though many Conquistadors were married to Spanish women and though having an indigenous woman or African women slaves as a concubine was illegal, this did not deter them from following their carnal desires. As Dussel writes, "as a result they colonized Indian sexuality and undermined Hispanic erotics since the double moral standard of machismo maintained the sexual domination of the Indian woman in tandem with merely apparent respect for the European wife."[91] The final outcome of this 'erotic violence toward indigenous women was a 'new race' that shaped the identity of the American continent. It was customary in the political realm of Anahuac to give gifts including women to important people. For that reason, when Hernan Cortez arrived in Aztec territory, high officials representing the emperor gifted him twenty women including Doña Mariana, along with other luxurious gifts. "This woman symbolizes the American Indian women, who, educated and fluent in Mayan and Aztec, would eventually mother 'a son from her master and lord Cortés."[92] Many writers credit "Doña Marina" or "La Malinche" as the mother of this new race. This link of mestizaje to gender is important to discuss together not just to highlight the role of women and to show the connection to the Purity of Blood Laws and the Inquisition but furthermore to emphasize the repeated history of violence against women imposed by this colonial project. This included them joining of the ranks and leadership in the Zapatista National Liberation Army.

[90] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas,* 46.
[91] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas,* 46.
[92] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas,* 46.

Mestizaje also took place among African slaves, who were forced by the thousands to come and work in the Spanish colonies due to the rapid decline of indigenous population as a result of disease brought by Europeans and harsh conditions imposed on them by their masters. Vinson III points out the gender imbalance in this population as well: "the few African women who were brought to the Spanish kingdom often engaged in miscegenation with their masters, frequently by force,"[93] resulting in an entirely new population called 'mulatos.' With time and with the arrival of multiple ethnic groups on the continent, the continued violence towards women, gender imbalance, and the intermarriage taking place in the New World, there was an increase in the hybridity among different ethnic groups. This resulted in endless categories of people. Vinson reminds us that while everything started with three main bloodlines, "españoles (white), indios (Indians), and negros/morenos (blacks)"[94] in a short time there was a fluidity of races in the American continent worth highlighting: "mestizos (mixture of white and Indian), mulatos (mixture of white and black), and pardos or zambos (mixture of black and Indian. Over time, pardo became virtually synonymous with mulato, thereby losing much of its indigenous referencing. A final category found with frequency, at least in colonial Mexico, was that of the castizo (mixture of white and mestizo)."[95] Towards the last part of this section, I add one more category not mentioned in Vinson's book. This grouping was not 'birthed' until the end of the modern era, but I argue it is nonetheless an imperial construction made to racialize one geographical location and discriminate against a particular population.

Returning to the project of 'castizaje' in the New World, some of the challenges for members of these new communities included their continued isolation from the affairs of the

[93] Vinson, *Before Mestizaje*, 6.
[94] Vinson, *Before Mestizaje*, 44.
[95] Vinson, *Before Mestizaje*, 45.

colonies. The enforcement of the Spaniards' ideology of superiority made it almost impossible for those of mixed ancestry to hold public office, own land, and to enter the priesthood, even in the land of their birth. In chapters 3 and 5 I discuss at greater length how this population along with the indigenous communities contested this discriminatory treatment. With no political representation, indigenous, Africans, and those of mixed descent found it impossible to integrate into society.

Another negative effect of castizaje worth discussing has to do with the physical characteristic displayed by this diverse population, a characteristic later used to discriminate against them. Spaniards who believed that their ancestry dated back to the first parents of humanity, Adam and Eve, viewed mestizos as people with defects. Vinson writes that "mixed-race people were often described as being of 'color quebrado' (broken color)"[96] and allegedly the only way to "improve" their condition was to intermarry with individuals with "purer" blood or most clearly of European descent. Similar to mestizos in the Spanish colonies, economic policies implemented regarding land ownership marginalized the indigenous population and African slaves, creating an economic divide among "mixed" people and Spaniards who continued to appropriate the majority of the resources of the New World. Most important, they instituted forms of social exclusion that remain to this day. In the next chapter I introduce a method used by the Spaniards conquistadors to integrate some of these groups of people partially while reaffirming the exclusion of others from hierarchical classifications of race.

Conclusion

The 'Invention' of America did not stop with the establishment of the Spanish colonies. The extraction of profitable resources that began five hundred years ago and continues to this

[96] Vinson, *Before Mestizaje*, 49.

day as reported in the Lacandon Jungle of Chiapas by the Mayan communities is all part of the colonial project that will not be complete until all its inhabitants are subjugated and brainwashed into the doctrine of modernity. In this chapter I have shown how religious ideologies influenced the creation of a racial classification that contributed to the exclusion of certain groups of people. First, I discussed how the interpretation of the 'Curse of Ham' was used to promote inferiority of civilization and legality for slavery. Second, I examined the impact of the 'Invention' of America and the 'Discovery' of a new kind of people with religion. Third, I argued how the Purity of Blood laws and the Inquisition targeting Conversos and Moriscos became a blueprint for the colonial project when it was transferred to the Americas. Finally, I introduced the concept of 'castizaje' and explained how it was an adaptation of the 'pureza de sangre' promoted in the Iberian Peninsula. With the arrival of the modern era we would see this project morph into the concept of 'latinidad' which would operate as one more category in this racial classification and continues to be an instrument of exclusion and marginalization of the indigenous communities and of people of African descent.

Chapter 2

Convert or Die: The Role of Religion in the Conquest of the Americas

Ever since the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors on the American continent, the indigenous population has consistently experienced untimely death. On January 1, 1994 the Zapatista National Liberation Army said "Basta!" (Enough!) and chose to put an end to this vicious cycle by organizing themselves. Identifying themselves in the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle as a "product of 500 years of struggle," the movement reminded us of the history of the indigenous people fighting against the different powers who have attempted to subjugate their people and deprive them of their own resources. At the same time, by arming themselves and vocalizing their dissatisfaction with how they had been treated all these years, the EZLN gained support from the international community while also creating opposition from their own local government. Not surprisingly, subcomandante Marcos recognized the continuous attempt to suppress their uprising by reflecting on their historical ability to organize and resist any opposition:

> We were born between blood and gunpowder; and between blood and gunpowder were raised. Every so often the powerful from other lands came to rob us of tomorrow. For this reason it was written in a war song that unites us: "If a foreigner with his step ever dares to profane your land, think, Oh beloved motherland, that heaven gave you a soldier in each son." For this reason we fought. With flags and different languages the foreigner came to conquer us. He came and he went.[97]

[97] Daniel Justino Delgado and Joe R. Feagin, "Latinos in the United States: Understanding the Historical and Systemic Foundations of Racial Oppression," in *Dynamics of Multiculturalism: Beyond Post-Racial America*, ed. Martin Guevara Urbina (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas Publisher Ltd., 2014), 37.

While in the past the invaders were other imperial nations that included Spain and the United States, this time around, the invaders are transnational corporations in partnership with the federal government.

Years after declaring war, the EZLN has attempted to help indigenous communities gain independence from the Mexican government with hopes of preserving their traditions and maintaining their way of life while encouraging the formation of governing bodies that look out for the interest of the people as supposed to what the national government has tried to do in the past. Regrettably this attempt to gain independence has clashed with President Ernesto Zedillo's neoliberal agenda. During his presidency, Zedillo's government implemented many crafty ways to smother the uprising, including militarizing the zone of Chiapas in order to take control of the most important roads and block communication among the rebel communities.

From a witness account of the occupation by governmental military forces, George Caffentzis describes what he observed in the region: "between thirty to fifty thousand troops were poured into a relatively unpopulated region of Mexico until there was a ratio of one soldier for every two residents. The military encampments were constructed immediately adjacent to all the openly declared EZLN villages. These camps often housed more troops than residents in the villages they were to intimidate."[98] With arrival of the Mexican army in the Lacandon Jungle, more roads were constructed to provide easy access to the different combat zones. At the same time, the military partnered with local communities by providing federal funds to build roads, schools and clinics in hopes of securing their loyalty while ignoring the needs of those communities who sympathized with the EZLN in the area.

[98] George Caffentzis, "The Politics of Massacre: Acteal, Low Intensity Warfare and NGOs*," Schools for Chiapas,* Accessed July 18, 2019, https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/understanding-acteal-massacre/.

Although there were multiple efforts to ease tensions between the government and the Zapatista army with groups like the National Intermediation Commission led by Bishop Samuel Ruiz, whose purpose was to work towards peaceful resolutions, there was no success. Because behind the scenes the government continued to find ways to clamp down on the movement and avoid the attention of the international community.

The presence of troops added tension to the area, forcing thousands to flee in order to avoid the conflict. This created a displacement of entire communities in the region, making them vulnerable and easy prey for the violent tactics of pro-government paramilitary groups. In the first years of this war, this clandestine organization supported by government had been responsible for more than 1500 deaths, but on December 22, 1997 their actions towards civilians would be on the front page of the newspapers. According to witnesses, on that Monday morning there were shootings like any other day. This was a tactic used to scare members of the communities. This time, however, as the shooting of automatic weapons continued throughout the day, indigenous people left everything behind in their homes of Acteal and gathered in a small church in hopes of finding safety and salvation in this sacred space. Most of the members of the group were composed of unarmed Tzotzil Maya Indian women and children coming from 'The Abejas' (the bees), a pacifist community. Caffentzis informs us that in that afternoon, "many of the people were in the chapel praying, so [members of the paramilitary groups] began to shoot into it, killing some and when the reminder of the people tried to run out, they were shot or hacked with machetes at the entrance. Many more were killed than wounded and most of the forty-five murdered ones were women and children. After the massacre, the killers stripped and

mutilated many of the bodies."[99] The smell of blood was in the air. Death had found even the most vulnerable members of this community trying to stay away from any conflict.

In relation to the massacre of Acteal, the EZLN made an official communication describing in detail the accounts of December 22, 1997 and blaming the Mexican Government for sponsoring these terrorist groups by giving them weapons and funding for their efforts. At the same time, the EZLN highlighted the government's complicity in this violence by ignoring the plans of attack and covering up evidence from the press.

> According to radio transmissions of the government of Chiapas (intercepted by the EZLN) in the immediate surrounding of Acteal at the time at which the massacre was being carried out, public security police of the state of Chiapas backed up the attack and during the afternoon and evening dedicated themselves to picking up cadavers in order to hide the magnitude of the massacre. Misters Homero Tovilla Cristiani and Uriel Jarquin (Secretary and Subsecretary of the government of Chiapas respectively) commissioned the police to back up this crime. Mister Julio Cesar Ruiz Ferro was constantly informed of the development of the 'operation' (at least since noon of the 22nd day of December, when the massacre was an hour old). Approved by the federal and state government, the attack was fine-tuned on the 21st of December in a meeting of paramilitaries (led by Mister Jacinto Arias, PRI municipal president) of the communities of Los Chorros, Puebla, Esperanza and Quextic, all of them municipalities of Chenalho.[100]

Although at the end the blame was transfered to President Ernesto Zedillo, the EZLN recognizes this as being part of the strategy to "displace the Zapatista war and make it appear to be a war among the indigenous, motivated by religious, political and ethnic differences."[101] Any solution offered by the government was only an act to make it appear it was interested in the safety of all its citizens. The massacre of these innocent people has left Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

[99] Caffentzis, "The Politics of Massacre: Acteal, Low Intensity Warfare and NGO's."

[100] General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, "Details of the Acteal Massacre," *Struggle*, trans. Cecilia Rodriguez, accessed July 4, 2019, http://struggle.ws/mexico/ezln/1997/ccri_acteal_details_dec.html.

[101] General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, "Details of the Acteal Massacre."

asking three questions of the Mexican people: "Why? How many more? Until When?"[102] There is no doubt that this catastrophic and bloody event was part of a tactic to intimidate and discourage the indigenous communities who sympathized with the Zapatista movement.

The recurring theme of violence and death prompted now by the massacre of Actel takes me back to another event five hundred years earlier when the invaders also massacred unarmed indigenous people in a sacred space, this time in the city of Technotitlan. According to indigenous sources written in Nahuatl, also known as the Codex Ramirez and the Codex Aubin, dating almost to five hundred years ago, there is a description of a massacre during the Fiesta Toxcatl by the Spanish conquistadors, which Miguel Leon-Portillo said occurred during the celebration in honor of the Aztec god Huitzilopochtli, also known as the war god or sun god and often characterized in art either as a hummingbird or an eagle. Even though the city of Tenoctitlan was under siege by the Spanish, the Aztecs had asked permission to hold the celebration. After extended and elaborate preparations for the event that included making decorations and food under the supervision of the Spaniards, the event took place. Based on what was written,

> All the young warriors were eager for the fiesta to begin. They had sworn to dance and sing with all their hearts, so that the Spaniards would marvel at the beauty of the rituals. The procession began, and the celebrants filed into the temple patio to dance the Dance of the Serpent. When they were all together in the patio, the songs and the dance began. Those who had fasted for twenty days and those who had fasted for a year were in command of the others; they kept the dancers in file with their pine wands.[103]

[102] General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, "Details of the Acteal Massacre."

[103] Miguel Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 73.

The Aztecs were unaware that the celebration would be interrupted by the blood thirst of the Spaniards who had planned to attack the celebrants as is mentioned in the codex. When the celebration became livelier,

> the Spaniards were seized with an urge to kill the celebrants.[104] They were armed and ready, closing all the entrances to stop anyone from running away. They ran in among the dancers, forcing their way to the place where the drums were played. They attacked the man who was drumming and cut off his arms. Then they cut off his head, and it rolled across the floor.
> They attacked all the celebrants, stabbing them, spearing them, striking them with their swords. They attacked some of them from behind, and these fell instantly to the ground with their entrails hanging out. Others they beheaded: they cut off their heads, or split their heads to pieces.
>
> They struck others in the shoulders, and their arms were torn from their bodies. They wounded some in the thigh and some in the calf. They slashed others in the abdomen, and their entrails all spilled to the ground. Some attempted to run away, but their intestines dragged as they ran; they seemed to tangle their feet in their own entrails. No matter how they tried to save themselves, they could find no escape.[105]

The decorations, the food, and the celebration were all forgotten in an instant and instead the space was filled with lifeless bodies butchered…in the name of civilization? In the name of god? In the name of Spain? Perhaps all of the above. Unfortunately, this would not the first or last massacre at the hands of the Spaniards at which innocent people would be murdered, and while history has tended to focus on the advancements obtained by the arrival of Europeans on this continent, the life of the inheritors of this continent call for their story to be told.

Returning to the violent scene described earlier, the Codex describes the following: "the blood of the warriors flowed like water and gathered into pools. The pools widened, and the stench of blood and entrails filled the air."[106] In another source from anonymous authors of Tlatelolco, we find a short description of the killings and the treacherous acts of the true savages,

[104] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 74.
[105] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears,* 76.
[106] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears,*76.

the Spaniards. When the King Montecuhzoma, who was a prisoner by the Spaniards, cried out in desperation at the scene, this is what he said: "Our lords, that is enough! What are you doing? These people are not carrying shields or macanas. Our Lords, they are completely unarmed."[107] These questions and admonitions by the Aztec emperor resonate with the same questions asked by Subcomandate Marcos after the massacre of Actel. The death of innocent indigenous people continues to be a trend even five hundred years later. But while we know how the colonial enterprise has operated since its birth five hundred years ago, resulting in the oppression, violence against, and death of those who oppose the project, in this section I am interested in finding out what has allowed and even validated the agenda excusing the slavery and deaths of millions and the appropriation of their resources.

In this chapter I propose that religion as practice played an important role in the conquest and subjugation of the Americas. I begin this section by arguing how the religious narrative of the Aztecs contributed to the infectiveness of the Emperor to plan a military strategy to defend his people against the Spanish invaders. At the same time, I make brief reference to other components that contributed to the defeat of the indigenous people, including the character of Montezuma and the weaponry of the Spaniards. To support this argument, I look at translated documents from almost five hundred years ago which perhaps have been ignored and forgotten due to the origins of the source. These sources fall under the category of 'subjugated knowledges,' a term introduced by French philosopher Michel Foucault and referring to "historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist of formal systematization."[108]

[107] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears,*131.
[108] Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 19.

In the second section, I propose that Messianic interpretation used by the Spanish Crown drove the Spanish army to do everything in their power to explore other geographical locations in order to bring salvation to the 'savages' in those lands. However, at some point the alliance to the Christian god was replaced by their own ego and eventually manifested in the worship of gold, or in the words of the Judeo-Christian tradition, Mammon.

In the third section I discuss the strategy to oppress entire nations with the help of missionaries and I also show how the Church provided the legal and theological means to appropriate the land and any other resource that would rob the indigenous people of their wealth. Finally, in the fourth section I share a brief account of the violence that occurred in the name of God, based on the accounts of the indigenous people, Spaniards conquerors, and religious figures like Bartolome De Las Casas.

I. The Religious narratives of the Aztecs and their contribution to the ineffective ability to prepare for the Spanish invasion.

As presented in the previous chapter, the arrival of Europeans on this continent altered the course of history for both civilizations. The natural resources stolen out of the 'New World' combined with the forced labor of the natives allowed Europe not only to profit economically but to be in a position of power in which they could dictate the accounts of these events and manipulate the truth without accountability. For the indigenous population, besides losing gold, land, freedom, and in millions of cases even their own lives, nothing can describe the depths of the catastrophic reality of losing their ability to retell their own story. It took many centuries for thinkers like Walter Mignolo and Enrique Dussel to expose the Eurocentric lie and to argue that most of what we "know" today is an invention. Mignolo writes in *The Idea of Latin America*, "The narratives that described the events as "discovery" were told not by the inhabitants of Anahuac or Tawantinsuyu, but by Europeans themselves. It would be four hundred and fifty

years until a shift in the geography of knowledge would turn around what Europeans saw as a "discovery" and see it as an "invention."[109] For that reason without deviating from our argument, it seems important to begin this chapter by presenting a general landscape of the Americas before the conquest to better understand how a great civilization fell victim to small group of charlatans who used the Aztecs' perceived religious interpretation of the Spaniards arrival as their strategy to defeat the Aztec Empire and eventually to subjugate an entire continent.

Renowned Mexican anthropologist Miguel Leon-Portillo describes in his book *The Broken Spears* the scene that perhaps initiated the beginning of the end for the Aztec Empire. The fall of Tenochtitlan was a crucial event in the colonial project that, with time, resulted in the subjugation of the entire continent at the hands of the Spanish invaders. On November 8, 1519, Hernan Cortes and six hundred of his soldiers entered the great city of Tenochtitlan, a city built on an island in what was called the Lake Texcoco in the valley of Mexico. After many reconnaissance missions, they finally had the opportunity to enter the heart and soul of the Aztec civilization. Leon-Portillo recounts this event:

> The Spaniards arrived from the direction of Tlalpan, to the south of the city, passing across one of the wide causeways that connected the island with the mainland. When they reached a locality known as Xoloco, they were welcomed by the last of the Motecuhzomas, who had come out to meet them in the belief that the white men must be Quetzalcoatl and other gods returning at last from across the waters now known as the Gulf of Mexico. Thus Cortes and his men entered the city, not only as guest, but also as gods coming home.[110]

Before we explore the declaration that the Spanish invaders where perceived as "gods coming home," I would like to highlight the amazement of the conquistadors as they entered the city and their wonder at the architectural beauty and technological advances before their eyes. Bernal

[109] Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 2.
[110] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, xxv.

Diaz, a Spanish conquistador who accompanied Hernan Cortes in his quest of conquering Mexico, documented what he witnessed in his book *The Conquest of New Spain*, which in this case captures the reaction of the Spanish soldiers as they arrive: "And when we saw all those cities and villages built in water, and other great towns on dry land, and that straight and level causeway leading to Mexico, we were astounded. These great towns and *cues* and buildings rising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision from the tale of Amadis. Indeed, some of our soldiers asked whether it was not all a dream."[111] Also, Diaz clarifies that these soldiers had traveled the world and seen some amazing cities but nothing compared to what they beheld as they entered the great city of Tenochtitlan. "Some of the soldiers among us who had been in many parts of the world, in Constantinople, and all over Italy, and in Rome, said that so large a market place and so full of people and so well regulated and arranged they had never beheld before."[112] Perhaps these statements and others captured by Spanish invaders contradict the erroneous perception promoted in the European continent that as a civilization Europeans were more developed and superior in comparison to other geographical locations including "the Indians" found in the "Americas" whom the first witnesses labeled as uncivilized and unable to govern themselves. With many records stating the contrary, Enrique Dussel argues in favor of changing that erroneous Eurocentric perception that American civilization was not as advanced. In his book *A History of the Church in Latin America* he writes:

> In America the European conquistadores and colonists encountered two highly developed cultures: the Mayan-Aztec in Mexico and Central America, and the Inca in Peru. At the time of the arrival of the Spanish each of these indigenous cultures had reached a stage of development more or less on the level of the Egyptians during their first dynasty. The

[111] Bernal Diaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 214.

[112] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, xxxv.

> 'cultural distance' therefore between the Spanish and the Indians of these two superior cultures was more than five thousand years.[113]

Indeed, Leon-Portillo confirms that the Aztec Empire "possessed a superb architecture, sculptural art, and pictograph manuscripts (usually called codices), an exact science of time (expressed in their two calendars), a complex religion, just but severe laws, organized commerce, an educational system, a knowledge of herbal medicine, and a powerful warrior class."[114] While the establishment of Tenochtitlan began with the building of just a few huts on land previously ignored by other tribes on the swampy island of Texcoco and with an altar to the war god Huitzilopochtli, with time it become a metropolis that would put any European city to shame. Leon-Portillo helps us understand that "the wealth and military power of Tenochtitlan were a result of the conquests accomplished by Itzcoatl, who ruled between 1428 [and]1440."[115] The Aztecs were known for subjugating and taxing surrounding nations in hopes of expanding their domain, but soon after reaching their empire's peak, the arrival of these "strange people" suggested their days would be counted.

Yet the earlier question remains: How did an empire with such military power succumb to a few hundred Spanish invaders? What contributed to the vanishing of such an advanced civilization? Exactly what precipitated the oppression of millions of people lasting more than five hundred years of which the EZLN speaks in their Lacandon Manifesto? While many authors have suggested many answers to these questions, I suggest that a religion played a major force in the conquest of the Americas. The question may be related to most powerful Aztec emperor,

[113] Enrique Dusell, *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation (1492-1979)* (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Erdmans Publishing, 1981), 37.

[114] Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, trans. Jack Emory Davids (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), xxii.

[115] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, xxxviii.

Moctezuma, and why he surrendered his throne to Cortes on the basis of an erroneous religious interpretation.

a. Omens and Inaccurate Interpretations of Prophecy

For the many civilizations in pre-Hispanic America, religion was crucial in guiding the different communities, for it brought meaning and explanation to many of life's events. The questioned asked earlier—How did an entire empire surrender to Hernan Cortes who had only such a small number of soldiers? — could perhaps be answered by reviewing a few of the original records left regarding this period. In reading Leon-Portilla's book *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the conquest of Mexico*, it seems the reason the great Emperor Moctezuma acted passively towards these invaders instead organizing a plan to attack them immediately was due to his interpretation of many earlier prophecies well known to the wise men of this ancient civilization.

Rather than being a people with "no religion" as Cristopher Columbus labeled the natives of the Americas, the pre-Hispanic civilizations in central America had for centuries had their own religious beliefs, forms of spirituality, rituals, and sacred spaces which helped them find purpose and meaning in the different events of life. The aftermath of the conquest of this continent was in a way foretold by different sources, which the Aztecs interpreted as being the will of the gods. In this section I highlight and share different prophecies dating back to a time before the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadors to this continent in hopes of showing how this religious narrative played an important role in paralyzing an entire empire and in the end contributed to the fall of the Aztec civilization.

Stephen A. Colston in his article "No longer will there be a Mexico" explains how omens and prophecies in the Aztec culture were used as guides to everyday conduct: "It was believed

that parts of the future could be foretold by omens and prophecies. Essentially, omens are signs which have been interpreted as the coming of future events while prophecies are declarations that such events will occur."[116] We have access to some of these ancient omens and prophecies in part due to the meticulous work of Franciscan missionary Bernardino de Sahagun (1499–1590) who compiled the information passed down by the natives first in Nahuatl, the language of the Mexica (Aztecs), and eventually translated to Spanish. Even though the original manuscript is lost, a bilingual copy called the Florentine Codex from 1578–1579 has been recovered. In the Florentine Codex there are eight omens recorded and even though none speaks directly of the Spanish invasion, the gist of each omen and prophecy is of ruin and devastation for the Aztec Empire. This undoubtedly created an anticipation that contributed to how passively the Aztecs responded to the Spanish conquistadors.

The first omen documented in the Florentine Codex begins by describing a "celestial phenomenon," which the scientific community might interpret simply as a comet but in ancient times, according to the source, caused "a great outcry and confusion."[117] For the Aztec civilization, acts of nature were directly linked to historical events. The account of this omen concludes: "Ten years before the Spaniards first came here, a bad omen appeared in the sky. It was like a flaming ear of corn or a fiery signal or the blaze of daybreak; it seemed to bleed fire, drop by drop, like a wound in the sky. It was wide at the base and narrow at the peak and it shone in the very heart of the heavens."[118] The feeling of fear it instigated is not foreign; Colston clarifies that "the descriptions of terror felt by those who reportedly witnessed the 'tongue of

[116] Stephen A. Colston, "No Longer Will There Be a Mexico: Omens, Prophecies and the Conquest of the Aztec Empire," *American Indian Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (Summer 1985): 239, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1183828.

[117] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 4.

[118] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 4.

fire' and the comet are not exaggerated since such celestial occurrences were often interpreted by the natives of pre-European times to portend harm, and they evoked great fear in the hearts of people."[119]

The second omen mentioned in the *Codex* describes how the temple of Huitzilopochtli, one of the principle deities in Aztec religion, unintentionally caught fire. When the people first noticed, they attempted to put out the fire but failed. Witnesses recorded the following: "The flames swiftly destroyed all the woodwork of the temple. When the fire was first seen, the people shouted: "Mexicanos, come running! We can put it out! Bring your water jars…!" But when they threw water on the blaze it only flamed higher. They could not put it out, and the temple burned to the ground."[120] The third omen tells of a lightning striking the temple of Xiuhtecutli to which the people said, "the temple was struck by a blow from the sun."[121] The fourth omen describes fire through the sky like that of a comet. Once again records indicate the people panicked and wonder the meaning of these strange events. The fifth omen mentioned in the Florentino Codex describes the winds making the water of the lake boil and eventually overflowing into the city. "The wind lashed the water until it boiled. It was as if it were boiling with rage, as it is were shattering itself in its frenzy. It began from far off, rose high in the air and dashed against the walls of the houses. The flooded houses collapsed in to the water."[122] The six omen speaks of a woman weeping from night to night, "wailing and crying out in a loud voice: "My children, we must flee far away from this city!"[123]

[119] Colston, "No Longer Will There Be a Mexico," 241.
[120] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 4.
[121] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 5.
[122] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 5.
[123] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 6.

The seventh Omen gives a more direct message of the arrival of strange beings to their lands. It begins with the capture of a "bird the color of ashes" by men fishing in the lake. They brought the strange creature to Moctezuma.

> This bird wore a strange mirror in the crown of its hear. The mirror was pierced in the center like a spindle whorl, and the night sky could be seen in its face. The hour was noon, but the stars and the mamalhuaztli could be seen in the face of that mirror. Motecuhzoma took it as a great and bad omen when he saw the stars and the mamalhuaztli. But when he looked at the mirror a second time, he saw a distant plain. People were moving across it, spread out in ranks and coming forward in great haste. They made war against each other and rode on the backs of animals resembling deer. Motecuhzoma called for his magicians and wise men and asked them: "Can you explain what I have seen? Creatures like human beings, running and fighting…!" But when they looked into the mirror to answer him, all had vanished away, and they saw nothing.

The eighth and final omen recorded was of strange creatures found in the streets of the city. Those who found them described them as "deformed men with two heads but only one body." When they took them to Moctezuma, they disappeared.

Montezuma ordered as search for wise men and magician in hopes of fully understanding the omens and the events described to him. When these men were brought by his officials, Moctezuma asked, "Have you not seen strange omens in the sky or on the earth? In the caves under the earth, or in the lakes and streams? A weeping woman, or strange men? Visions, or phantasms, or other such things?"[124] Unfortunately these magicians had nothing to say, so an angry Moctezuma locked them away until they could give him an answer. He insisted to his officials that the magicians share whatever they knew. "Tell the magicians to say what they believe: whether sickness is going to strike, or hunger, or locusts, or storms on the lake, or droughts, and whether it will rain or not. If war is threatening Mexico, or if there will be sudden deaths caused by wild beasts, they are not to hide it from me."[125] The magicians answered "What

[124] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 14.
[125] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 14.

can we say? The future has already been determined and decreed in heaven, and Motecuhzoma will behold and suffer a great mystery which must come to pass in his land."[126] And so it began to sink into the Emperor's mind that no matter what military strategy he planned with his officials and generals, the gods had spoken and there was nothing he could do to change his people's future.

Yet there is a twist. Regarding these omens, Colston explains, "Most, if not all, of these omens were likely composed by post-Conquest native raconteurs who, by presenting these events as though they occurred before the Spaniards arrived, sought to demonstrate the imminence of a calamity and, by extension, the inevitability of this event. Viewed in this fashion, the Mexica were powerless to alter their fate, and their glory, then, would remain untarnished by the Conquest."[127]

b. The Aztec Emperor and his Overconfident Personality Failed to Strategize a Military Campaign Against the Invaders.

The omens mentioned above foretold of the fall of the Aztec Empire, but Colston uses other ancient sources to explain the reason why the gods permitted the collapse. These were prophesied much earlier and give reasons for the collapse. The source used is "Cronica X," which in its original form has unfortunately been lost. But because the Dominican chronicler Diego Duran (1537? –1588?) used it frequently, we are able to reconstruct parts of it. "Most of what is known about the 'Cronica X' is of the version used by Duran which he called the 'Historia Mexicana'; the text of this 'historia' was written by an Indian in Nahuatl probably sometime between 1531 and 1570–81." The essence of these two prophecies have to do with

[126] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears,* 14–15.
[127] Colston, "No Longer Will There Be a Mexico," 240.

"Motecuhzoma's excessive arrogance [which] provoked Huitzilopochtli who then directed his anger against the ruler as punishment."[128]

While Spanish missionaries attributed the catastrophic events that brought about the end of the Aztec Empire to the locals' "idolatrous" practices, which included human sacrifices and the worship of many deities, the natives of the land saw it differently. They understood their deities to be in charge of their people's destiny. The original authors of the 'Cronica X' shared the perspective that "Motecuhzoma was not subdued by the Spaniards because Huitzilopochtli had been vanquished by the European's God but because Huitzilopochtli had directed his indomitable power against one of his mortal subjects as punishment for excessive pride. The Conquest was, then, explained as being shaped by forces entirely within the natives' cosmos."[129] The Aztecs had subdued surrounding nations using advanced military strategies, yet no account mentions Moctezuma planning to attack the Spaniards. The Aztec emperor had thousands of warriors available to fight at any point and yet choose to engage none of them. Why?

In Cronica X we find two prophetic narratives that directly address the pride of Moctezuma and the desires of the gods for his rulership to be over. The first prophecy describes an "Indian" entering a cave and meeting a god (Huitzilopochtli) who instructs him to place a hot item on the leg of someone who appears to be the Aztec emperor. Because the Indian was hesitant and concerned about doing this, the god reminds him that Motecuhzoma will not feel any burn "because he was intoxicated by his own arrogance."[130] Towards the end, the source gives an explanation of this interaction. "The god then proclaimed to the Indian that Motecuhzoma should enjoy his power to the fullest since his reign would soon end. He left no

[128] Colston, "No Longer Will There Be a Mexico," 243.
[129] Colston, "No Longer Will There Be a Mexico," 243.
[130] Colston, "No Longer Will There Be a Mexico," 243.

doubt that the termination of Motecuhzoma's reign was wrought as divine retribution for the ruler's arrogance."[131] The second prophecy mentioned in the 'Cronica X' references a talking stone. This stone was dedicated to the god Huitzilopochtli, but Moctezuma or also spelled Motecuhzoma felt it didn't represent the majesty of his empire, so he ordered a much bigger stone to be carved and brought to the city of Tenochtitlan. "As the object was hauled to the capital city, a haunting voice resounding deep within the stone called out to the workmen that Motecuhzoma's reign would soon come to an end. The stone proclaimed that Motecuhzomas' fall from power had been determined by divine will as punishment for this ruler's preoccupation with revering his own person at the expense of his patron deity."[132] The two prophecies continue to emphasize the weakness of character of the supreme leader of the Aztec empire and at the same time give us a glimpse of the reason why the Aztecs failed to prepare for the military invasion of the Spaniards.

c. The Spanish Arrive at the Coast

When Moctezuma was informed of some strangers coming to the coast, his response shows signs of common beliefs among the Aztecs and the awaiting of the fulfillment of prophecy of the return of Quetzalcoatl, the serpent god. Aztec accounts describe a fisherman sharing what he saw with the Aztec emperor and his officials: "Our lord and king, forgive my boldness. I am from Mictlancuauhtla. When I went to the shores of the great sea, there was a mountain range or small mountain floating in the midst of the water, and moving here and there without touching the shore. My lord, we have never seen the like of this; although we guard the coast and are always

[131] Colston, "No Longer Will There Be a Mexico," 243.
[132] Colston, "No Longer Will There Be a Mexico," 244.

on watch."[133] Moctezuma sent his officials to investigate , and after some time they returned to the palace and confirmed what had been previously reported: "Our lord and king, it is true that strange people have come to the shores of the great sea…They have very light skin, much lighter than ours. They all have long beards, and their hair comes only to their ears."[134] When Moctezuma heard this report, he was "downcast" and "did not speak a word."

Afterwards, instead of consulting military officials, Moctezuma talked to the religious priests and ordered his craftsman to make gifts. He gave his officials instructions to face their fate and meet these strangers with costly gifts, as was customary to do with important people. Documents indicate there were several attempts to meet and offer gifts to pacify the deities coming to their shores, since for the Nahua natives the only explanation for this encounter was the fulfillment of their prophecies that indicated the return of Quetzalcoatl. The codex captures Moctezuma's feelings that he passed on to his representatives: "He has appeared! He has come back! He will come here, to the place of his throne and canopy, for that is what he promised when he departed!"[135]

While, he waited for the messengers to return and report back, the experienced leader of the Aztec Empire is recorded as being "lost in despair, in the deepest gloom and sorrow."[136] When the first two messengers returned and gave the report to Moctezuma in the temple of the Serpent, the two were sacrificed as an honor to the gods. "Their breasts were torn open, and the messengers were sprinkled with their blood. This was done because the messengers had

[133] Kevin H. Siepel, C*onquistador Voices: The Spanish Conquest of the Americas as Recounted Largely by the Participants, Vol. 1* (Angola: Spruce Tree Press, 2015), 154.

[134] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 17.

[135] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 23.

[136] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 23.

completed a difficult mission: they have seen the gods, their eyes had looked on their faces. They had even conversed with the gods!"[137]

Eventually, the Spanish conquistadors made it to the city of Tenochtitlan. Bernal Diaz recounts the first meeting between Moctezuma and Hernan Cortes. While at the beginning it was all respect, nonetheless Montezuma let them know their perception of them, again confirming the perception of these strangers. "He ended by saying that we must truly be the men about whom his ancestors had long ago prophesized, saying that they would come from the direction of the sunrise to rule over these lands and that he was confirmed in this belief by the valor with which we had fought at Champoton and Tabasco and against the Tralscalans, for lifelike pictures of these battles had been brought to him."[138]

d. Weapons and technological superiority mingled with religious interpretation

Even though I would argue that religion played a major role in the interpretation of the events, the response of Montezuma towards the Spanish conquistadors, I have to recognize that the weapons gave a certain advantage to the invaders. The use of iron marked a difference. At the beginning of this encounter Cristopher Columbus wrote regarding some of their first encounter with the natives and their weapons, "They carry no arms and don't seem to know about them because I showed them swords and they took them by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron. Their light spears are just canes without iron. Some of them have a fish tooth at the tip, and others have something else."[139] A few years later, the messengers also reported to Montezuma of the different type of weaponry used by these strangers coming to their shores. This report terrified him. The Codex Florentino gives a

[137] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 23.
[138] Diaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain,* 220.
[139] Siepel, C*onquistador Voices*, 21–22.

fascinating description by one messenger regarding the cannon used by the Spanish soldiers, which made it seem as if these strangers had super powers:

> A thing like a ball of stone comes out of its entrails: it comes out shooting sparks and raining fire. The smoke that comes out with it was pestilent odor, like that of rotten mud. This odor penetrates even to the brain and causes the greatest discomfort. If the cannon is aimed against a mountain, the mountain splits and cracks open. If it is aimed against a tree, it shatters the tree into splinters. This is a most unnatural sight, as if the tree had exploded from within.[140]

The report continues by describing the use of iron in all their weapons including their protective shields and helmets that might well have intimidated the Aztecs. The use of horses, described as tall deer, and dogs for battle would have been foreign to the Aztecs and have put them at a disadvantage. The documents describe Motecuhzoma's feeling of defeat, even before any war was fought. "It was as if his heart had fainted, as if it had shriveled. It was as if he were conquered by despair." I conclude this section by quoting words of Enrique Dussel, which highlight the technological advantage of weaponry that power the small army to overcome the Aztec empire.

> The Aztec and Inca empires succumbed in holy terror before the power of the Spanish harquebuses, cannons, horses, bloodthirsty dogs, and weapons of iron and invincible armor. A mere handful of men conquered a continent with millions of inhabitants, thereby signaling the supremacy of the Mediterranean over the pre-Hispanic American civilization. This entire indigenous civilization was defeated by the Spanish and then exploited to the ultimate degree possible.[141]

e. Gifts and Spiritual Warfare

Under the belief that these strangers were deities, instead of resorting to the military who had won many battles, Motecuhzoma decided to consult with his officials to spiritualize the battle, using his magicians and warlocks in hopes of foiling the Spanish plans of invading

[140] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears,* 30.
[141] Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America*, 41.

Tenochtitlan. The Codex Florentino again informs us that he gathered as many people as possible that could use their magic to harm the Spanish. Because in the back of his mind these strangers were gods, Motecuhzoma provided prisoners to be sacrificed in hopes the rituals would appease the Spanish conquistadors. "The envoys sacrificed these captives in the presence of the strangers, but when the white men saw this done, they were filled with disgust and loathing. They spat on the ground, or wiped away their tears, or closed their eyes and shook their heads in abhorrence."[142] Motecuhzoma had sent his magicians hoping a curse would fall or would make the Spanish sick, but based on the report brought back to the emperor, the magicians' attempt failed. "Our lord, we are no match for them: we are mere nothing!"[143] The fear of the Aztec leader began to be passed to his people. The prophecies seemed about to be fulfilled as the strangers marched towards the city. For a moment Motecuhzoma thought about running away or hiding, yet no record indicates his willingness to organize a military intervention. He was counseled by his officials to hide from the gods in one of the temples but finally he resigned himself to waiting for these strangers and facing his destiny.

To the very end, Moctezuma reasoned strategically that Cortez was Quetzalcoatl when he received him in Mexico City. Dussel notes that most prominent authors, including T. Todorov, N. Wachtel, M. Leon-Portilla, Octavio Paz, and J. Lafaye, focus on the insecurity of the Aztec emperor and do not address the main issue and in fact focus on his undecided and weak attitude towards the invaders without considering a military strategiy. Moctezuma's comments to Cortez give us a glimpse of his belief system: "Our previous kings informed us who rule your city that you would return to take up again your seat, your chair…Come, rest; take possession of your

[142] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears,* 33.
[143] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears,* 34.

royal houses; relive yourself."[144] In my reading, Dusell is the only scholar who argues that Montezuma strategically gave up the throne to confirm whether these strangers were gods or invaders. The fact that Cortes and his companions did not accept the sacrifices and the gifts offered with spilled blood but chose to ask about gold began to give hints of the reality that these men were actually invaders, not gods. Dusell writes, "The oddity that Cortes did not seize power over Mexico when offered it convinced Moctezuma that he was not Prince Quetzalcoatl bent on recovering his temporal power."[145] By the time that Moctezuma realized these were men invading his territory, it was too late. It was the beginning of the end. The Spaniards brought reinforcements that eventually overpowered Moctezuma's warriors and the Tenochtitlan fell into their hands.

II. Ego Conquistador: Unmasking the True Motives of the Conquest of America

Just as the Aztecs used their religious traditions to interpret natural catastrophes or inexplicable events like the arrival of strange 'white men' to their shores and eventually the destruction of Tenochtitlan at the hands of Hernan Cortez and his men, the Spaniards too used their own beliefs system to give meaning to events like the 'Re-conquista' of Spain and the expelling of the Jews and Moors, the "Discovery" of the New World, and eventually to justify the conquest and subjugation of the entire American continent. Even though Christianity had been adopted as the official religion of the Empire by the Romans back in the fourth century, the events of the fifteenth century discussed earlier allowed Christian theology to be a globalized ideology promoted and even forced on every conquering project in which the Spanish monarchy

[144] Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of the Other & The Myth of Modernity* (New York: Continuum Intl. Pub Group, 1995), 101.

[145] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 102.

was involved. This phenomenon happened in part due to how "Spain conceived [of] itself as the providential guardian of Catholic devotion"[146] and felt compelled to force others, including Muslims, Jews, and now the natives of the New World to adopt it—or be killed. From this period on, the Church became the official institution promoting these theological concepts to this project. But things began to shift as the conquest of the continent took place and God was pushed aside as the main influencer of the project, and self and wealth took the lead, paving the way to a more secular era.

As I continue to investigate the role of religion in the conquest of America, I begin this section by arguing that there were three primary forces that motivated the Spanish invaders to subjugate the continent of America. The first of these motives is perhaps the most notorious since it is related to the theological concepts promoted by the Church in the fifteenth century about providentialism, which is the idea in Christianity that God is directing all earthly events. In this case it included the 'discovery' of new lands and the ability to take possession of what was found in them. The second motivation driving the Spaniards to conquer the Americas is perhaps more philosophical. Nonetheless it is important to mention since it replaces the previous theological argument used by the Spaniards about their arrival on this continent and launches the modern era. The third thing that prompted the Spanish to invade the Americas and do violence to the land and people can be summarized as greed for gold and precious metals.

a. Providentialism and Messianism: The Initial Motivations for the Conquest of the Americas

The book of Isaiah in the Judeo-Christian Scripture describes two contrasting periods for "God's people" that started with a "dark" and troubled times for the people of Israel beginning

[146] Luis N. Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 51.

with the destruction of the temple and was followed by the exile of the Hebrew nation. Nevertheless, towards the end of the book of Isaiah there is the mention of better times. Chapter 60 hints at a new era for the kingdom of Israel, a period of restoration, glory, power, and wealth. Many interpreters over the centuries have tried to apply the text and the prophecy to their place and era. This was the case for the Spanish monarchs who, after expelling the Muslims and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, began to think of themselves as entering such a biblically-inspired new "era," which culminated with the discovery of the Americas and the appropriation of its natural resources. Matthew Carr in his book *Blood and Faith: The Purging of Muslim Spain* writes, "To some Spaniards, the conquest of Granada confirmed Spain's destiny as a 'New Israel' that had been chosen by God to undertake the reconquest of Jerusalem. Columbus's search for a new route to the Indies was partly intended to make possible a double-pronged assault on Islam from east and west."[147] Though I have previously highlighted Columbus' inability to know there was another continent and for that reason he cannot be credited for "discovering" America, in this section I suggest that his religious views and his own ambitions of greatness contributed to the 'Discovery' of a new world.

Returning to the concept of the 'new era' in Isaiah 60, its written there that, "Surely the coastlands will wait for Me; And the ships of Tarshish will come first, To bring your sons from afar, Their silver and their gold with them, For the name of the LORD your God, And for the Holy One of Israel because He has glorified you." Columbus used this passage as source of inspiration and hoped to receive credit for finding a faster route to India and in the process beating the Portuguese in finding such a passage. But what is even more true of his aspirations is that he hoped to search for and find Solomon's gold mentioned in the Old Testament in order to

[147] Carr, *Blood and Faith*, 37.

bring wealth and power to Spain (and presumably by extension himself). Rivera confirms that when Columbus interacted with the natives and inquired about gold, "the admiral [was] convinced that they are the ones from which Solomon brought… six hundred and sixty-six quintals of gold…Solomon bought all that gold, precious stones, and silver."[148] Columbus was hardly the only one interested in gold, as I explain in the following paragraphs.

The Holy Scripture continued to be a source that inspired the Spaniards' belief that God was directing Columbus to help Spain enter this new era and be the "New Israel. Bartolome de Las Casas, eventually the defender of the Indians, credited Columbus for his "discovery" and attributed it to God's leading in his life: "Dios es la causa mediate y eficiente, y el hombre la causa inmediata e instrumental. Asi, el descrubrimiento de America es el cumplimiento de un designio divino que fue realizado por un hombre elegido para ese efecto…Es hombre fue Cristobal Colon, a quien Dios doto de todas las cualidades necesarias para llevar a cabo la hazaña."[149] (God is the efficient/moving and through cause, and man is the immediate and instrumental cause. Thus, the discovery of America is the fulfillment of a divine design carried out by a man chosen for this purpose. This man was Cristopher Columbus, to whom God bestowed all the necessary qualities to carry out this achievement).

This ideology would be adopted by the Church and promoted by missionaries in the New World, to the extent of attributing biblical character to individuals like Cortez who consequently were seen as modern Moses leading the natives out of the bondage of idolatry.

Besides promoting the idea that God was behind every event, leading the Spanish Crown, the idea that God had chosen the Spanish people as the instrument to bring salvation to the

[148] Luis N. Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 237.

[149] Edmundo O'Gorman, *La Invención de América* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006), 35.

'idolater' nations the Spanish saw as a responsibility to be taken seriously. This messianic complex had already being highlighted by Columbus when he wrote to the Spanish Crown of the need to convert the natives of this new world since they seemed to him to be a people with no religion. In response to his assessment, the monarchs of Spain in partnership with the Catholic Church sent missionaries along with Columbus and his men to evangelize and promote the Catholic faith in the Americas. On her death bed, Queen Isabel encouraged the King Ferdinand and his officials to carry on with the mission given to them of preaching the gospel by taking missionaries to the New World: "I beg the King, my lord, with much affection, and I charge and command the Princess, my daughter, and the said Prince, her husband, to carry out and fulfill this charge, and that this be their principal aim, and may they apply much diligence in carrying this out."[150] Maria Elena Martinez in her book *Genealogical Fictions* mentions the fervor of the men sent to convert the natives:

> Known for their religious zeal, commitment to saving souls (the Observants had been active in the evangelization of moriscos in rural Spain), and messianic millenarianism, Mexico's early Franciscans suffused the colonial religious project with an intense utopianism. They were convinced that the dramatic events of 1492, including the expulsion of the Jews, prefigured the unification of humanity under Christianity, the second coming of Christ, and the apocalypse. The Friars also believed that Spaniards had been selected by God to convert as many initial non-Christians as possible in order to save their souls.[151]

Columbus and his men were not the only ones that were fulfilling Scripture by evangelizing. In every battle, Cortes and his soldiers claimed to see God's hand providing them with protection to help them accomplish the mission given to them. Cortes writes: "As Catholics and Christians, our principal intention must be directed toward the service and honor of God, our Lord, and the reason the Holy Father granted the Emperor, my Lord, dominion over these people…is that these

[150] Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 44.
[151] Martinez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 96.

peoples be converted to our Holy Catholic Faith."[152] Robert Ricard reminds us that Cortes even intended to evangelize Moctezuma ostensibly in hopes of drawing him to his faith, but perhaps in reality more selfishly to avoid a violent encounter. "Beginning with the first day, he summarized Christian doctrine to the emperor, pronounced against human sacrifices, and told him of the coming of the missionaries. Moctezuma firmly refused to accept (any of this), resisted all his arguments, all the sermons of the Mercedarian, and the prattling of the page boy Orteguilla, for whom he had taken a liking."[153]

The conquest of America was also seen as providential. Early accounts of these events repeatedly highlight this belief. We see it when Cortes attributes to God his safekeeping in all the battles, including the invasion of Technotitlan. In sum, Christian theological concepts inspired by Scripture helped the Spanish establish themselves on the continent and built a colonial project. With time, the invaders believed their killings of natives were e excused by the Bible too, as would be the case during slavery centuries later. Enrique Dussel in his book *The Invention of the Americas* maintains that religion was the most important tool used by the Spaniards in order to build the colonial project in the New World: "God provided the foundation for their enterprise, just as Hegel later affirmed that "religion is the fundament of the state." "God is thus used to legitimize actions that modernity would consider merely secular."[154] This theological motivation would be perhaps the more accepted drive for the Spaniards' actions in the New World, but is not the only one, as the next sections explain.

b. The Ego Conquistador and the Displacement of God: Is the Conquest of Mexico the birth of The Modern Era?

[152] Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 48.

[153] Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 19.

[154] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 50.

The conquest of the Americas marked a new era beginning with the "discovery" of a new continent in 1492, but that era did not come into fruition until the fall of Tenochtitlan in 1521. The conquest of Mexico was crucial in the colonization project of the American continent, but at the same time this event launched a project that had been in in the making in the Iberian Peninsula, as previously discussed in chapter 1. Nonetheless, Latin America would become the first ever colony of the Spanish crown and after seeing the success it would be replicated globally by other nations in the next centuries. It had been decades since the arrival of Europeans on the continent, but according to Enrique Dussel, prior to this significant event "no conquest had taken place in the Caribbean, from Santo Domingo to Cuba, since no urban culture existed in those regions, but only scatted indigenous tribes and ethnic groups. The slaughter and seizure of small villages could not compare with subjugation of the Mexican empire."[155] This event signaled the age of coloniality, also known as modernity. According to Walter Mignolo, "you cannot be modern without being colonial."[156] says in his which would continue to morph for the next five hundred years and to which the Zapatista movement makes reference in the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle.

Until the fifteenth century, God had been the source of inspiration for the Spaniards who, thanks to their involvement in the Crusades, the expulsion of the Moors and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, and the "Discovery" of America felt sure they were following God's command—to the point of highlighting the reason for their involvement as being to evangelize the pagan people. But something shifted with the conquest of Mexico. God and the gospel were no longer the priority, even though they continued to use theological language to describe their

[155] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 38.
[156] Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 6.

actions and motivations. Dussel helps us understand what happened five hundred years ago. After the conquest of Mexico there was a replacement of God for the 'ego conquiro'—the 'I-conqueror.' This shift signaled the era of modernity. The concept of 'I-conqueror' to which Dussel refers, precedes Rene Descartes' philosophical argument of the 'ego cogito' (I think, therefore I am) by 150 years. If Cartesian philosophy maintains that the ability of thinking/reasoning gives human beings 'God-like' attributes, and the 'I' replaces God as the ultimate source, then Dussel argues that the 'I-conquering' would give God-like attributes too, with the 'I' replacing 'God.' In reference to this argument, Nelson Maldonado-Torres says that after the conquest, a "new God is born: modern man."[157] There was continued expansion of the Christian faith, except the ultimate source of guidance for this project was now no longer God but the "I." According to Maldonado-Torres, this shift of ideas gave the conqueror the ability to play by his own rules without accountability. Maldonado-Torres writes, "If God does not exist, then anything is allowed" is preceded in the first stages of modernity by the idea that "given that anything is allowed (with respect to the colonized/racialized subject), then there is no God (and therefore I am God."[158] Perhaps this is why at the Conquest of Mexico, the violence against the indigenous population is not regulated and only a few voices like that (eventually) of Bartolome de Las Casas spoke against it.

This shift documented by Dussel opened the door for the colonization of the Americas. What was instituted during this period was not only a period of domination by the Spanish Crown that would be imitated by other nations around the globe but an ideology that would be

[157] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Religion, Conquest, and Race in the Foundations of the Modern/Colonial World," 652.

[158] Maldonado-Torres, "*Religion, Conquest, and Race,"* 652.

used throughout the modern era called coloniality. Maldonado-Torres in his essay "On the Coloniality of Being" explains the difference between the two:

> Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rest on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration.[159]

Coloniality continues after colonialism is officially over. For that reason, we see the Zapatista movement speak against this ideology embedded in modern-day Mexico and affecting the indigenous community.

Briefly discussion this motivational shift is important because coloniality operates in many spheres and in many guises. Walter Mignolo in his book *The Idea of Latin America* argues that coloniality is manifested in four areas of human experience. "(1) the economic: appropriation of land, exploitation of labor, and control of finance; (2) the political: control of authority; (3) the civic: control of gender and sexuality; (4) the epistemic and the subjective/personal: control of knowledge and subjectivity."[160] The economic aspect would first be seen when the Spaniards began to search for gold during the invasion. But with time and a religious strategy, the Spanish also appropriated land and exploited the natives of this continent for labor. Without God in the picture and only the 'ego-conquiro' in charge of this colonial project, the violence turned into genocide without accountability.

Dussel concludes his argument by stating that the conquest began as one of geographical territory but eventually the focus shifted to conquering the actual inhabitants. "After the geographical recognition of a territory, one proceeded to control the bodies of the inhabitants,

[159] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (March/May 2007): 243.

[160] Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 11.

since they needed to be pacified, as it was customary to say in that epoch."[161] Religion was the Spaniards' preferred method to "pacify" the savages of the land. In the next section, I explain in more detail the strategy implemented with the help of the Church not only to "pacify" the indigenous population but also to rob them of their possessions, rights, and dignity.

In summary, once the Spaniards conquistadors understood their ability to subjugate others, they felt they themselves had achieved the 'God-like' qualities missing, and realized that they no longer needed God to carry out their colonial project.

c. Gold not god: The genuine quest of the Conquistadors

The pursuit of gold and not the desire to promote god took priority in the Spaniards' agenda as they began exploring the continent. The wealth from this quest funded the colonial project that was then implemented in the New World for centuries. Though Columbus wanted recognition for finding a faster route to India, and while it is true he believed in the Church's mission of evangelizing every tribe and nation, he couldn't hide his ambition of finding (Solomon's) vast store of gold. In his journal entry of Saturday, October 13, 1492, which was really more of a report directed to the King and Queen of Spain, Columbus wrote about his main interest: "I saw some men wearing a small piece of gold hanging from a piercing in their nose, and tried hard to learn if they had gold. I was able to understand by their signs that somewhere to the south there was a great king who had gold in large quantities, including enormous golden vessels. I tried to get them to guide me there, but soon saw they had no intuition of doing so."[162] In time, Columbus' ambition to find gold would inspire many other to cross the ocean in hopes

[161] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 38.
[162] Siepel, *Conquistador Voices*, 25.

of finding gold and gaining wealth. In the remaining segments of this section I unmask these truer motives for the conquest of the Americas and the aftermath of this intense drive.

Much has been said about the desire to convert the indigenous population to the Catholic faith, but it was their desire for gold that was the driving force behind the Spanish expeditions which led to their colonizing this territory, its peoples, and natural resources. Luis N. Rivera argues that that, "the Conquest revealed gold as the true god, the idol that motivated the treatment given the inhabitants of the New World by the conquistadors."[163] After witnessing the atrocities by the Spaniards in the New World, even Bartolome de Las Casas wrote to King of Spain questioning the actions of his countrymen, "Who is the true god of the conquerors? God or gold?"[164] On another occasion, De Las Casas wrote to the king regarding the same attitude, noting that "Their ultimate reason for destroying such an infinite number of different souls has been only to obtain gold, to stuff their coffers with wealth in a short period of time, and to attain a high status out of proportion to their persons. All this results from their insatiable greed and ambition."[165] Every interaction with the natives highlights this quest for gold, which seems to be the only thing on the conquistadors' minds.

When the conquistadors were marching towards the city of Tenochtitlan, Moctezuma sent his officials with gifts for these Spanish strangers, as a sign of peace and welcome. The gifts consisted of some of the valuable materials used by the Aztecs, including gold. Their greed was observed by the indigenous population and even documented, confirming their true motives for invading the city. De Las Casas recounts that, "when they were given these presents, the

[163] Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 260.
[164] Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 259.
[165] Bartolome De Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, trans. Nigel Griffin (London: Penguin Press, 2004), 12.

Spaniards burst into smiles; their eyes shone with pleasure; they were delighted by them. They picked up the gold and fingered it like monkeys; they seemed to be transported by joy, as if their hearts were illumined and made new. The truth is that they longed and lusted for gold. Their bodies swelled with greed, and their hunger was ravenous; they hungered like pigs for that gold."[166] The Codex Florentino indicates that when the Spaniards were eventually introduced to the Aztec emperor Moctezuma, without hesitation they demanded to be given full access to all royal treasures.

> When they arrived at the treasure house called Teucalco the riches of gold and feathers were brought out to them: ornaments made of quetzal feathers, richly worked shields, disks of gold, the necklaces of the idols, gold nose plugs, gold greaves and bracelets and crowns. The Spaniards immediately stripped the feathers from the gold shields and ensigns. They gathered all the gold into a great mound and set fire to everything else, regardless of its value. Then they melted down the gold into ingots.[167]

The Spaniards continued searching the palace and the temple for more gold, for whatever they found was never enough.

Other primary sources tell us of the continuous search for gold before and after the fall of Tenochtitlan. As the Aztec population fled the city, Spanish soldiers positioned themselves in key places in order to search for gold being carried by those running away to safety. "The women carried their gold under their skirts and the men carried it in their mouths or under their loincloths. Some of the women, knowing they would be searched if they looked prosperous, covered their faces with mud and dressed themselves in rags. They put on rags for skirts and rags for blouses; everything they wore was in tatters. But the Spaniards searched all the women without exception."[168] Even as the city laid in ruins from the fire, Cortes demanded from the

[166] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 51.
[167] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 68.
[168] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 118.

officials the last pieces of gold. "The Aztecs unloaded it from canoes: there were bars of gold, gold crowns, gold ornaments for the arm and legs, gold helmets and disks of gold. They heaped it in front of the Captain, and the Spaniards came forward to take possession of it. Cortes said: "Is this all the gold in the city? You must bring me all of it."[169] The insatiable desire for gold drove the Spaniards to force the natives to extract this precious metal from the earth and begin mining in the New World at the cost of their sweat and blood. Rivera writes, it is "the price of blood and worthy of eternal fire, for there is no arroba (twenty-five pounds weight; trans. note) of gold or silver that placed in a balance with the blood of the Indians they kill for these (metals), that would weight more than the blood"; "gold…was mined with the death of the Indians"; "it seems that by nature gold kills men because of the work required to mine it."[170]

The colonial project established five hundred years ago began pushing the Christian God to the side and demanding gold from the subjects. That, broadly speaking, continues to be the case in Latin America, where there is widespread exploitation of natural resources and human labor.

III. The Sword and the Cross: Religious Strategies to Subjugate an Entire Continent

In his first voyage toward the New World, Cristopher Columbus described his first encounter with the natives in his journal entry of Friday, October 12, 1492, which the notes suggest seem to be directed towards the King and Queen of Spain. Highlighting the natives' approachable attitude towards the Spanish sailors Columbus writes, "They were friendly to us, and …I could see they were a people who could likely be converted to our holy faith by love

[169] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears,* 120.
[170] Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism,* 258.

more than force."[171] Even though in chapter one we discussed how his description of the indigenous population created a new category in European grouping of people based on their religious affiliation, by analyzing the closing statement of this entry we can see a clear political agenda laid down by the Spanish Crown in regard to their intentions towards the natives of this land. Columbus continues, "They should prove to be good servants and intelligent, because I noticed that they can very quickly repeat everything I say to them. I feel it will be easy to make them Christians—it seems to me they in fact have no religion."[172] At first it appears that evangelizing this 'new kind' of people seem to be part of an innocent and redemptive work proposed by Columbus. However, Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues that his intention was not to 'save' them but to bring them into submission to the Church and Spanish Crown—a quite different reality than the salvation spoken of in the gospels. "[In] Columbus' description of the natives as beings without religion rather than subjects with false religiosity, we see the initiation of a new regime, one based more on degrees of being than on degrees of truth or falsity. Subjects with the wrong religion are to be refuted, while subjects without religion are 'discovered,' indoctrinated, perpetually enslaved and colonized."[173] Following Maldonado-Torres's argument that it began with the 'discovery' but as time passed it continued with indoctrination into the Catholic faith, resulting in the colonization of the land, body and the soul, in this section I argue that five hundred years ago, religion was used as the most effective instrument for subjugating the entire continent. Nonetheless, the system of oppression created centuries ago continues to oppress the indigenous population in Mexico to this very day. I begin by highlighting how the forceful methods of evangelizing the natives left them with only the

[171] Siepel, *Conquistador Voices*, 22.
[172] Siepel, *Conquistador Voices*, 23.
[173] Maldonado-Torres, "*Religion, Conquest, and Rac*e," 647.

options of converting to the Christian faith or dying at the hands of the Spanish conquistadors. Next, I emphasize the role of the Church in legalizing the conquest of America by using theological concepts which stripped the ownership of lands from the indigenous population. Finally, I conclude this section by exploring how the law was applied to transfer authority to the Spanish Crown for evangelizing the natives and possessing the land while excusing any violence to those opposing these policies.

Convert or Die! The Forceful Conversions of the Americas

Even though missionaries did not accompany Columbus on his first voyage across the Atlantic, immediately after requesting of the King and Queen of Spain the proper support to convert the Indians —who according to his perception had "no religion" due to not falling under the previous categories in the Iberian Peninsula—Columbus received permission to bring religious leaders on his next expedition. Justo Gonzalez details in his book the beginning of *Christianity in the America*s as soon as 1493: "Columbus' second voyage saw the arrival of the first Christian missionaries to American soil. Foremost among these were three Franciscans, a Hieronymite, and the ex-Benedictine Fernando Boyl, who served as apostolic vicar of the new lands."[174] Gonzalez likewise documents how the arrival of the Christian faith on the continent presented two aspects of Christianity—the loving and caring side for the indigenous population, and the aggressive and violent aspect on which I focus in this section. "For every missionary who treated the Indians with the gentle hand of persuasion, there were others who used the brutal hand of coercion."[175] Regardless of the different interpretations of the same faith, missionaries at least were united in emphasizing loyalty to the Catholic Church and the Crown of Spain. Dussel

[174] Ordina E. Gonzalez and Justo Gonzalez, *Christianity in Latin America*: *A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 28.

[175] Gonzalez and Gonzalez, *Christianity in Latin America,* 40.

remind us of what was required of the missionaries towards the natives, namely to "teach them Christian doctrine and to inculcate in them every day the principal prayers, commandments and precepts until they knew them by rote. This spiritual conquest also imposed a different time cycle (liturgical cycle) and alternative notions of space (sacred spaces). The whole indigenous sense of ritualized existence underwent change."[176] Besides the implementation of Western Christianity in the life of the Indians, their life style would change with the loss of rights, as the Spaniards begin to force obedience to the Church and the Spanish Crown.

Even though the "discovery" of the Americas introduced a new religion to the natives, the forced conversion of the entire continent did not happen until the fall of the Aztec Empire. Hernan Cortez was credited with helping to defeat the Aztec Empire, which signaled the beginning of colonialism in the Latin America. Cortez is documented as being a greedy individual who had already obtained wealth and made a name of himself in the newly discovered lands, and even though he was living in Cuba, his ambition drove him to look for an opportunity to lead an expedition deep into the heart of Mexico.

Besides his unsatisfied thirst for gold, Cortez was known for his devotion to the Christian faith. Robert Ricard in his book *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico* describes him as someone who "always carried on his person an image of the Virgin Mary, to whom he was strongly devoted; he prayed and heard Mass daily; and his standard bore these words: Amici, sequamur crucem, et si nos fidem habemus, vere in hoc signo vincemus."[177] (Friends, let us follow the cross and if we have faith under this sign we shall conquer). These words he used to inspire his soldiers on his expedition to the interior of Mexico.

[176] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 54.

[177] Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 15.

We could continue to focus on Cortez' desire to convert the indigenous population, including the Aztec emperor Moctezuma, but it was more than a few individuals like Cortez forcing conversion and instead it had become the political agenda of the Spanish Crown, who had already received permission from the Catholic Church to evangelize the newly 'discovered' territories. A letter that King Velazquez wrote to Cortes illustrates this:

> You must bear in mind from the beginning that the first aim of your expedition is to serve God and spread the Christian Faith. You must not, therefore, permit any blasphemy or lewdness of any kind, and all who violate this injunction should be publicly admonished and punished. It has been said that crosses have been found in that country. Their significance must be ascertained. The religion of the natives, if they have one, must again be studied and a detailed account of it made. Finally, you must neglect no opportunity to spread the knowledge of the True Faith and the Church of God among those people who dwell in darkness.[178]

At every encounter with natives, invaders explained the Christian doctrine to them and forcefully insisted that they leave their "idolatrous" traditions. Spanish conquistadors were given the command by the Catholic Church to destroy all their "statues" and only allow them to worship the cross and an image of the Virgin Mary. The persuasion to accept the Catholic tradition was always difficult for the natives to understand since it was done in Spanish, the language of the conqueror.

Recall that the real reason for evangelizing was not so much a desire to share the good news but a military strategy to repress any future rebellion against the Spaniards. In the 'Oridinances regarding new discoveries and towns' written by King Felipe II, he insisted that missionaries be sent as part of every expedition since their work would be strategically to 'pacify' the savages. "In those parts where the preachers of the gospel are sufficient to pacify the Indians and convert them and bring them to peace, do not allow other persons to enter who may

[178] Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico,*16.

disturb the conversion and pacification."[179] Rivera in *A Violent Evangelism* explains the real meaning of the term 'pacification' used by the Spanish Crown: "This last expression, 'pacification,' plays a key role in the Ordinances. It is substitute for the traditional term 'conquest,' which is excluded from the official vocabulary in Spanish legislation for the Indies. Even armed actions are referred to as pacifying actions."[180] For that reason, every action by the Church in the New World should be studied with suspicion since they share responsibility for the conquest of the Americas based on the documents mentioned.

According to Dussel, the spiritual conquest continued to take place at every encounter because the "Spanish considered indigenous religion demonic and their divine, they pursued a policy of tabula rasa, the complete elimination of indigenous beliefs, as a first step in replacing those beliefs with their own."[181] Bernal Diaz narrates the first encounter Cortez and his soldiers had with natives of Cozumel as they were on their way to Tenochtitlan. Diaz explains that after teaching the Christian doctrines, the leaders refused to change, admitting that their ancestors had worshipped these gods. So, "Cortes ordered us to break up the idols and roll them down the steps, which we did. Next, he sent for some lime, of which there was plenty in the town, and for some Indian masons; and he set up a very fair altar, on which we placed the image of Our Lady."[182]

Conversion was not easy. Many of the natives did not understand the theological explanations given to them for forcing them to abandon their forms of spirituality. Diaz recounts another encounter with some chiefs and religious leaders of the towns that the Spaniards visited

[179] Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism,* 45.
[180] Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism,* 45.
[181] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas,* 51.
[182] Bernal Diaz, *The Conquest of New Spain,* trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 63.

on their way to Tenochtitlan. As the gospel was preached to them, Diaz writes, "The papas and the Caciques answered that their ancestors had worshipped these gods because they were good, and that they dared not do otherwise. They said that if we were to throw them out we should see what harm would come to us, for we should perish at sea. Then Cortes ordered us to break up the idols and roll them down the steps, which we did…..and he set up a very fair altar, on which we placed the image of Our Lady….make a cross."[183] One cannot clarify enough that those who refused to accept the Christian faith were be killed, so one can argue that the cross came with the sword. Out fear or conviction, there were many who accepted the Christian doctrine, yet there were others who only accepted for the sake of survival and convenience.

At the same time, those who adopted the new religious tradition imposed on them but then returned to their pre-Hispanic traditions or deviated from the 'truth' were punished. The religious persecution in the New World was similar to that decades earlier in the Iberian Peninsula. Even the methods like of the Inquisition were replicated. Gonzalez writes, "the use of torture was again integral to the Spaniard's efforts to arrive at the 'truth.' Indians confessed to having shrines passed down from previous generations and to keeping idols to which they paid homage…Once discovered, such hidden practices by any Indian community did not go unpunished. The guilty were quickly dealt with. Initially, Indians who deviated from traditional Catholic practices were subject to the Inquisition."[184] In their desire to converting the natives, the Spaniards relied on a militant faith that is responsible for the killing of millions, appropriation of land, and destruction of culture and knowledges. Grosfoguel reminds us that "the methods of colonization and domination used against Al-Andalus were extrapolated to the Americas."[185] For

[183] Bernal Diaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 62.
[184] Gonzalez and Gonzalez, *Christianity in Latin America,* 61.
[185] Grosfoguel, "Epistemic Racism/Sexism," 79.

that reason, it is important to see the events in the Americas through the context of the episodes in Spain.

Robbing in the Name of God: The Role of the Church in the Appropriation of Land

Although the account of the 'Discovery' of America has been demystified in the previous chapter, there are two of Columbus' action from that event of October 12, 1492 worth highlighting since they continue to demonstrate how the early fabrications incorporated in the colonial project have oppressed the indigenous population for five hundred years continuing into present-day Latin America. I refer in particular to how the description of the population referred as "tabula raza' was used as an excuse to indoctrinate them to the Catholic faith yet it was never with the intention to redeem them and bring them into their full humanity since from the first encounter Columbus had described their destiny as servants of Spain. "They should prove to be good servants."[186] In this section I would elaborate more on how evangelism was the most successful weapon used to subjugate an entire population. Similarly, the other act by Columbus worth highlighting is the renaming the land, described in his own writings, paves the way for the Church and the Crown of Spain to appropriate the land of the Americas and strip rightful ownership from the indigenous people. The protocol described Columbus arriving on the shores and baptizing the territory with a Christian name with a special dedication to the Spanish Crown. In th last section of the chapter, I focus directly on how the Church used the remaining of the land to their advantage in order to obtain ownership.

In *Conquistador Voices*, Kevin Siepel argues that Dominican priest Bartolome de Las Casas was familiar with Columbus' diary logs. De Las Casas recounts what happened on

[186] Siepel, *Conquistador Voices*, 23.

October 12, 1492 when the admiral and his sailors 'discovered' land after weeks of sailing across the Atlantic Ocean. Columbus was under the impression that he had arrived at the territory ruled by Grand Khan of China. When they saw the first island, which is known today as San Salvador, he changed the name and took possession of this territory.

> The admiral summoned the two captains and the others who had come ashore, as well as Rodrigo de Escobedo, recording secretary of the fleet, and Rodrigo Sanchez, of Segovia, and ordered them to bear faithful witness that the was taking possession before all assembled—which he did—of this island for the king and queen, their sovereigns, making all required declarations, all of which may be found written.[187]

Cristopher Columbus began to repossessed the native's land from his first voyage across the Atlantic Ocean in October 12, 1492 and he also used religious vocabulary to excuse his actions and perhaps implemented a pattern that would continue be used by the colonial powers around the globe. Luis Rivera reminds us that as a symbol of expropriation Columbus did two things: he placed the cross in every land on which he set foot, and he baptized the place using Christian connotations to signify that it belonged to the Spanish Catholic Monarchy. Rivera explains that by changing the original names of the territory, which had roots in pagan names, and giving them a Christian name instead, it was like the ritual of baptism. "The act of naming it has hidden meaning, potentially sinister. It implies an expropriation; the denial of the present inhabitants' authority to name the land they inhabit and, and as a result, to possess it. The lands have been baptized by the European—an act in which the natives lack any participation."[188] At the same time, it enforces that authority claimed by Europeans to dominate the other, just like the narrative of Genesis 1 in which Adam names the animals and so exerts authority over them.

[187] Siepel, *Conquistador Voices*, 20.
[188] Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 8.

This act also tells us that in the mind of the Europeans the land before them was vacant and unowned. Spanish historian Francisco Morales Padron explains this phenomenon that was implemented by other colonial powers too:

> Expropriation happened because the Indies were considered "res nullius" (belonging to no one) and Columbus wins and incorporates them "non per bellum" (not by military force) but "per adquisitionem" (by juridical procedure), taking possession in the name of the Catholic Monarchs so that no other Christian people could settle on them, since "vacabant dominia universali jurisdiction non possesse in paganis" (the infidels do not have the right of jurisdictional authority), and therefore whoever expropriates them would be their Lord.[189]

Appropriation of land was not a new concept five hundred years ago, since any conquering army could take over any territory. What was new was the Church legally authorizing the seizure of properties and allocating all resources to the conquering kingdom/nation, resources including the people who lived on that territory. Dussel reminds us that Spain was not the first one to receive authorization to possess "discovered" lands: "The Pope awarded to the Portuguese Crown exclusive authority over all of Africa,"[190] which included the taking of all resources, the evangelizing of the people, and possessing the land. At the same time those who didn't comply were excommunicated, including the natives who perhaps did not understand the colonial model imposed on them or even the language by which it was being communicated. But the true origins of 'Patronato' go back to the conquest of the 'Canary Islands' in 1418, and most notoriously applied in 1492 at the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula and the repossession of the lands from the Moors.

However, what happened in the Americas was a much more extensive project in which an entire continent was taken from the native peoples and given to the invaders *with the blessing*

[189] Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 9.
[190] Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America*, 38.

of the Church. Regarding the Patronato in the Americas, Dusell writes, "This was the first time in history that the Papacy gave to a nation the twofold authority to colonize and evangelize, that is temporal and eternal, political and ecclesiastical, economic and evangelistic authority."[191] The Church was instrumental in legalizing the practice of expropriation as is evident in the bulls written by Pope Alexander VI in 1493.

El Requerimiento: Legitimizing Slavery and Death

As the years progressed, the Spanish Crown continued to wrestle with the true meaning of the 'Discovery.' Even though they always maintained that their primary purpose was to preach the gospel to the natives and convert them from their idolatrous practice, in fact other ambitions quickly took priority. In Spanish society, there seemed to be a constant search for ways to legitimize their presence in the 'New World' and to establish new colonies. The answer to this quest would come in 1511 with the writing of the document known as 'El Requerimiento, which, according to Luis Rivera, was "an attempt to give theological legitimation of the papal grant of the 'New World' to the Castilian sovereigns for the purpose of evangelization."[192] In his article, *Islands of the Ocean Sea*, William Goldman summarizes the origin of that written document by attributing to Ferdinand of Aragon, regent of Castile, the efforts of gathering religious leaders and lawmakers to put together something that would excuse or better yet legitimate the actions of the Conquistadors as they encountered the indigenous population, especially if they encountered opposition to their efforts of Christianizing the New World. The leader of the committee responsible for 'El Requerimiento' was a popular lawyer named Juan Lopez de Palacios Rubios, who attempted to follow the law and do what it was right in the eyes

[191] Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America,* 38.
[192] Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism,* 33.

of European society. Goldman differs with this opinion and instead unmasks the true meaning of his legacy by sharing the real purpose of this legal document:

> The point of Requerimiento was to justify violence against natives, and it did this through a relatively conservative legal theory of just war. Theologians and conquistadors might have laughed, but lawyers didn't, neither Spain nor Rome, nor importantly, in Paris or London. Palacios Rubios had provided Spain with a clear legal authority to colonize the New World through the use of violence in defense of faith, a concept that would have fallen flat with the natives themselves but found much favor with other Europeans, the document's intended audience.[193]

El Requerimiento began by explaining with theological arguments what gave the Roman Catholic Church authority over all people, including Christians, Muslims, Jews, and even those people recently discovered. "Of all these nations, God our Lord gave charge to one man, called St. Peter, that he should be Lord and Superior of all the men in the world, that all should obey him, and that he should be the head of the whole human race, wherever men should live, and under whatever law, sect, or belief they should be; and he gave him the world for his kingdom and jurisdiction."[194] At the same time, there is a section explaining the justification for Spain's possession of the New World that concludes with an invitation for people found in the new territory to submit to both of their authorities—Church and Crown. Submission to the Spanish Crown included conversion to the Catholic faith. The concluding paragraph includes a warning for those who refuse to accept the Spanish ruling over them. The consequences for rejecting the authority of the Church and Spanish Crown was simply enslavement or death. One must read the final threat of 'El Requerimiento' in order to get a more realistic perspective of the intentions of

[193] William S. Goldman, "Islands of the Ocean Sea': The Requerimiento and European Expansion in the New World," *Republic of Letters* 5, no.3 (February 2018): 4. https://arcade.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/RofL_v07i01_Goldman.pdf.

[194] El Requerimiento, *American Beginnings: The European Presence in North America, 1492-1690*, National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox, updated January 2007, https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/amerbegin/contact/text7/requirement.pdf.

the Spanish conquistadors and the double standards of the Church for using theological arguments:

> I certify to you that, with the help of God, we shall powerfully enter into your country, and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can, and shall subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and of their Highnesses; we shall make you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such shall sell and dispose of them as their Highnesses may command; and we shall take away your goods, and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can, as to vassals who do not obey, and refuse to receive their lord, and resist and contradict him; and we protest that the deaths and losses which shall accrue from this are your fault, and not that of their Highnesses, or ours, nor of these cavaliers who come with us.[195]

The Spanish Crown defended the form in which the document was written, arguing that it was formulated in a way to develop dialogue with the 'Indians,' and present clear options for submitting themselves to their ruling and their doctrine. Unfortunately, there was no dialogue since the indigenous population did not understand the formalities of this document. Besides, as Dussel reminds us, the indigenous population was incapable of responding to these demands since their primary language was Nahuatl and 'El Requerimiento' was written and read aloud to them only in Spanish. But even with the help of an interpreter, the theological arguments presented to them were poorly done by the missionaries and unclear to their audience since the Aztecs had their own deities, which they had worshipped for generations. Tzvetan Todorov addresses this challenge in his book *The Conquest of America* when he explains how the Aztec theologians refuted the Christian faith. "Our religion, they say, is an ancient one; our ancestors have long adhered to it; hence, there is no reason to abandon it."[196] Over and over the Christian missionaries heard the same arguments that fueled the people's refusal to comply with 'El Requerimiento.' Rivera writes, "the misfortune of the American natives, the rejection of

[195] El Requerimiento, *American Beginnings: The European Presence in North America, 1492-1690*.

[196] Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, 82.

Christian preaching converted them, ipso facto, into rebels against the faith, into provokers of a grave offence against God and the cause of the just war against them, the confiscation of their property, and their possible enslavement."[197]

Slavery was forced on those who refused the Christian faith, but accepting doctrine preached to them did not spare them from servitude since the Catholic Church had cleverly created a system called 'encomienda,' which was a system of labor imposed on the indigenous population of the Spanish colonies. Rivera again explains this methodology implemented in the New World to indoctrinate the natives in the ways of the Church and also of European society. "The supposed purpose of this *repartimiento* (apportioning), a word often used as a synonym for e*ncomienda*, of natives was to evangelize them, to teach them good and proper customs ("so they will not do the things they used to do, nor bathe, nor purge themselves as often as they do no"), and to give them the discipline of work."[198] The Spanish Crown, in order to differentiate between slaver and encomienda, drafted a legal document that limited to two or three years the amount of time for which 'Indians' could live in such communities. At the same time, it was imperative to distinguish the purpose for the 'encomiendas' by calling them servants and not slaves. Despite all the written stipulations, the 'encomenderos'—the person entrusted with caring for the 'Indians'—did as they pleased. De Las Casas, a former encomendero himself, wrote to the Spanish Crowns about the atrocities implemented by the encomenderos, arguing that this system was no different than the subjugation imposed on those who had rejected the Christian doctrine. De las Casas' statement opened a new discussion of the rights of the indigenous people in Spanish society, which I discuss at greater length in chapter three.

[197] Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 34.
[198] Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 114.

> The *encomenderos*, who have only been *encomenderos*, and not conquistadors, do not be deceived, Your Excellency…they are tyrants…because those people are free by right and natural law and did not and do not owe the Spaniards anything…*Encomiendas* in themselves are bad, wicked, and intrinsically depraved, not in harmony with any law or reason, because to give or apportion free men against their will, commanding them for the good and usefulness (of the Spaniards).[199]

The Church continued to excuse and ignore the violence imposed on the inhabitants of the New World by the Spanish conquistadors for years. Along with slavery, death was the inheritance of millions of innocent people during this era. Again, we find in De Las Casas' writings detailed accounts of the bloodshed applied in the colonies, forcing us to examine what role the church played in the conquest of the entire continent.

Conclusion

I explored in this chapter the role of religion in the conquest of America beginning with multiple references to the religious narratives of the Aztecs, which I argued contributed to their ineffective ability to prepare for the Spanish invasion. I discussed how Christian doctrine played a crucial role in giving meaning and purpose to conquest of the New World, and while I pointed at other different motives that inspired the Spaniards to invade the American continent, I argued that there was always a theological component to these intentions. Lastly, I highlighted how religious institutions validated the invasion, the appropriation of land, the enslavement of the natives, and how they excused the genocide of innocent people in the Spanish colonies. Reflecting on the suffering to which the Spanish conquistadors subjected the indigenous populations on this continent, I cannot help but think that it was always the view of the natives that god was the reason for all these events. To illustrate this, I conclude by quoting a poem

[199] Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*, 118.

written in Nahuatl by witnesses of the Fall of Tenochtitlan, which I argued earlier was the event that signaled the conquest of the Americas.

> Our cries of grief rise up and our tears rain down, for Tenochtitlani is lost. The Aztecs are fleeing across the lake; they are running away like women. How can we save our homes, my people? The Aztecs are deserting the city: the city is in flames, and all is darkness and destruction. Motelchiuhzin the Huisznahuacatl, Tlacotzin the Trailotlacatl, Oquitzing the Tracatecuhtli are greeted with tears. Weep, my people: know that with these disasters we have lost the Mexican nation. The water has turned bitter, our food is bitter! These are the acts of the Giver of Life.[200]

Religious ideologies indeed helped to explain to both civilizations five hundred years ago the events developing before their eyes.

[200] Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 146.

Chapter 3

Religion and Protest:

The EZLN and the Rise of Christian Theology in Defense of the Indigenous Population during the Colonial Period of Mexico

As Mexicans anticipated Pope Francis' six-day visit to Mexico in February 2016, everyone wondered about his agenda of celebrating mass in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas, two decades after the uprising of the Zapatista movement. Many had hoped the revolt would immediately transform the desperate living conditions of the indigenous population in this location, but that has not completely happened. Believers hoped the pope would address the marginalization of these indigenous communities who have suffered at the hands of the colonial powers ever since the conquest of America. Pedro Arriaga, spokesman for the Roman Catholic Diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas, attempted to minimize the high expectations put on the pope's visit in an interview with an LA Times reporter: "In Chiapas there is a situation of extreme poverty, of marginalization of the indigenous community, of social conflict. We know that one visit by the pope won't resolve all that…But we do hope for a profound spiritual experience with the people that will help us transform our social conscience."[201] Ironically, the Catholic Church's focus on this particular geographical location has been full of contradictions. In the early stages of the EZLN uprising, the Vatican accused Samuel Ruiz, the bishop of the Diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas, of promoting Marxist ideologies and a misleading

[201] Patrick J. McDonnell, "Chiapas, little changed two decades after revolution, awaits Pope Francis," *Los Angeles Times*, February 15, 2016, accessed August 8, 2019, https://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-pope-chiapas-20160215-story.html.

theology that supported the indigenous people's uprising. Rumors of Church officials' efforts to remove Ruiz from the area continued until he finally resigned in April 2000.

Since Church leadership had not supported the work of Bishop Samuel Ruiz among the indigenous communities, many wondered how Pope Francis would address this dilemma. (I will elaborate on Ruiz's legacy and his link to the Zapatista movement toward the end of this chapter.) Many people were consequently surprised that Pope Francis took the time to pray at the tomb of this misunderstood religious figure, perhaps signaling the Church's reconciliation with his ministry. The pope followed up by apologizing to the indigenous population for the Church's actions toward them during the Spanish conquest of Latin America, actions that were detailed in chapter 2. Rev. Bernardo Range, a communications officer for the Diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas, highlighted Ruiz' contributions to the indigenous people's struggles when he said,

> He was a bishop of his people. He had a pastoral project that included incorporating the laity as catechists and the ordination of deacons which allowed for the faith to spread in the remote zones of the region. By praying in the cathedral, Francis not only honors his pastoral plan, but also the heart of a shepherd who ate, cried, and shared the pain of this people.[202]

While these words finally affirmed the ministry of Bishop Samuel Ruiz, previous popes had opposed his style of ministry and specifically his approach to social justice issues in Chiapas.

On the same day, Pope Francis celebrated Mass in three different indigenous languages spoken in Chiapas—Tzeltal, Tzotzil, and Chol. This act marked a reversal of the Church's policy of trying to "Hispanize" the people by attempting to diminish the indigenous cultures, languages, and forms of spirituality which existed long before Christianity's arrival on the continent. Ironically, this had been one of the many changes Bishop Samuel Ruiz had incorporated in his

[202] Inés San Martín, "Pope Francis Demands Justice for Mexico's Indigenous Community," *Cruxnow*, February 15, 2016, https://cruxnow.com/church/2016/02/15/pope-francis-demands-justice-for-mexicos-indigenous-communities/.

worship—for which he had been roundly criticized and reprimanded by Church officials at the time who believed it was sacrilegious to incorporate the 'pagan' cultures in the Church. In his homily given before a crowd that included hundreds of indigenous people, Pope Francis compared the struggle of the Hebrew people in the book of Exodus to that of the indigenous population in Mexico and almost validated their desire for liberation: "A people who experienced slavery and the Pharaoh's tyranny, who endured suffering and oppression to the point where God said, 'Enough! No more! I have seen their affliction, I have heard their cry, I know their sufferings.'"[203] Ironically, Ruiz had used this same biblical story to raise people's consciousness about the oppressive state of the indigenous people and the freedom God intended them to have. Pope Francis continued his homily with an analogy from the Mayan sacred book, a move that in the past would been criticized, as happened when Bishop Samuel Ruiz included references to Mayan culture in Catholic worship.

> It is an experience, a reality which is conveyed by a phrase prayed in *Popol Vuh* and born of the wisdom accumulated in these lands since time immemorial: "The dawn rises on all the tribes together. The face of the earth is immediately healed by the sun." The sun rose for the people who at various time have walked in the midst of history's darkest moments. In this expression, one hears the yearning to live in freedom, there is a longing which contemplates a promised land where oppression, mistreatment and humiliation are not the currency of the day. In the heart of man and in the memory of many of our peoples is imprinted this yearning for a land, for a time when human corruption will be overcome by fraternity, when injustice will be conquered by solidarity and when violence will be silenced by peace.[204]

Pope Francis' recognition of the struggle of the indigenous people in Chiapas and the homage he paid to Mayan culture along with his acknowledgment of the ministry of Samuel Ruiz marks a

[203] Francis, "Holy Mass with Representatives of Indigenous Communities of Chiapas," February 15, 2016. *Vatican.va*, https://m.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160215_omelia-messico-chiapas.html.

[204] Francis, "Holy Mass with Representatives of Indigenous Communities of Chiapas."

historical turning point in the Church's attitude. Indeed, the pope's speech invoked themes of Liberation Theology, which earlier popes had criticized for infiltrating Marxist ideology into Christian doctrine. While the pope never specifically mentioned the EZLN and its contributions to the indigenous struggle, by calling for change in peaceful ways, the Church rejected armed movement.

In this chapter, I focus exclusively on the role of Christian religion in the formation of the EZLN. For many years in Mexican society, Bishop Samuel Ruiz was blamed for the uprising of the indigenous population in Chiapas. For that reason, I focus on the impact of Bishop Samuel Ruiz's ministry in the Lacandon Jungle and how his theological approach within the indigenous population in Chiapas is the linked to the revolt of the EZLN. Even after his passing, his legacy continues. That legacy is well worth exploring since it is perhaps one of the best results of the Liberation Theology movement. Enrique Krauze, one of the most respected intellectuals in Mexico described his contribution as follows:

> Su obra revolucionaria no debe oscurecer la labor evangelica que lo procedio por casi 25 años. Se trato del trabajo catequetico mas vasto, ordenado y profundeo emprendido en Mexico desde la conquista spiritual del siglo xvi (aunque muy distinto a aquel en sus perspectivas morales, ecresiologicas y teologicas). Y fue tambien, con toda probablidad, el experiment mas exitoso en arraigar la Teologia de la Liberacion (surgida a partir del Concilio Vaticano II) en la America Latina.[205] (His revolutionary work must not obscure the evangelical work that preceded it for almost 25 years. t was the largest, most orderly and profound catechetical work undertaken in Mexico since the spiritual conquest of the 16th century (although very different from that in its moral, ecclesiological and theological perspectives). And it was also, in all probability, the most successful experiment in rooting Liberation Theology (which arose from Vatican Council II) in Latin America.

Even though Bishop Samuel Ruiz is linked to the Zapatista movement, based on his acts of protest against the political and religious systems I suggest that his work in fact builds on the

[205] Enrique Krauze, *Redentores* (Mexico: Debolsillo, 2013), 439.

actions of a small group of rebel priests from over five hundred years ago. To this end, in this chapter I revisit three distinct epochs in which these religious figures protested against both the colonial powers and the Church in order to defend the rights of the indigenous population. Of course, their approach had a different basis, but their theological praxis inspired the field of Liberation Theology and this in turn eventually had a direct role in the formation of the EZLN.

First, I focus on what happened five hundred years ago in America, reviewing a few of the voices of discontent that not only spoke up against the Spanish invasion of Mexico but also worked tirelessly to create legal protection for the Indians. The most familiar name from this period is Bartolome de Las Casas. Yet there are two other important individuals who also contributed to this movement—Antonio de Montesino and Toribio of Motolinia. Second, I focus on the period in which Mexico was forged as a nation and consider the actions of two religious figures who took an unconventional approach in the Liberation of the indigenous population from Spain. Not surprisingly, their names are mentioned by the EZLN in the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle—Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla and Jose Morales y Pavón. Third, I conclude by underlining the role of Bishop Samuel Ruiz in the embodiment of Liberation Theology and his influence in the Zapatista movement.

I. Defensores de los Indios: Early Advocacy for Indigenous Rights and the Birth of a Theology of Liberation?

As stated in the first chapter, Columbus' observations about the indigenous population in the New World created a completely new racial category. At the same time, his remarks set in motion the project of colonization in America. By stating that the natives had "no religion," Columbus identified and underlined the opportunity to evangelize the 'Indians.' With the permission and support of the Spanish Crown, his second voyage in 1493 included missionaries

to fulfill this mission, specifically (as Justo Gonzalez notes) friars belonging to the Franciscan order. Gonzalez explains that the Franciscans Order of Friars Minor were founded in 1210 by St. Francis of Assisi, and that "[t]hey followed the Rule of St. Francis, which called for poverty, humility, and simplicity."[206] Eventually other orders joined the Franciscans in their mission of evangelizing the indigenous population of the Americas. The Dominicans, Augustinians, and Jesuits all established religious communities throughout Mexico.

As Christianity arrived in the New World, many of the missionaries aligned themselves with the Spanish conquistadors' treatment of the natives, but it is fair to say that a small minority of religious figures showed deep respect for the life and beliefs of the indigenous people. Justo Gonzalez notes that early in the 'Conquest of the Americas' there were two completely different sides of Christianity practiced by the Europeans: "For every missionary who treated the Indians with the gentle hand of persuasion, there were others who used the brutal hand of coercion."[207] The actions of the missionaries were debated in more theological conversations back in Europe. "Churchmen and schoolmen debated, in medieval style, on what was the exact nature of the Indian. Some theologians drew upon Aristotle, the consummate cataloger, to assess where in God's great universal order these strange beings belonged, while other challenged the very premises on which his writings were based."[208] Here, I draw attention to the voices of a few religious figures who five hundred years ago opposed the agenda of the Church and spoke against the brutalities of their own countryman by calling for laws to protect indigenous people's rights, even as Europeans negated their very humanity. I believe their form of protest, even with their limitations and bias, inspired a praxis of liberation within the Christian tradition, which

[206] Gonzalez and Gonzalez, *Christianity in Latin America*, 50.
[207] Gonzalez and Gonzalez, *Christianity in Latin America*, 40.
[208] Gonzalez and Gonzalez, *Christianity in Latin America*, 40.

would shape the field of Liberation Theology constructed in Latin American in the 1960s and '70s. The early theological work done by these individuals in the colonies opened a space for the Latin American Church to address their form of oppression five hundred years later. Perhaps the religious voice most well-known throughout Latin America today is that of Bartolome de las Casas. But there are two other individuals whose disapproval of the religious establishment in support of the colonization of the Indians inspired others for centuries, including Latin American theologians building the concept of Liberation theology.

Yet these individuals were hardly "saints" or "saviors" of the indigenous population. Even when they spoke in favor of and on behalf of the indigenous, it was primarily with their own agenda in mind. Hardly anyone acknowledged the rights of the people as inheritors of this nation. The assignment to pacify the natives with the teaching of the Catholic tradition was part of the missionaries' strategy to hasten the subjugation of New World.

Renowned Mexican historian Guillermo Bofil Batalla in his book *Mexico Profundo* addresses this dilemma when he explains how many of the friars who spoke against the abuses made by the *encomenderos* actually had their own agenda in defending the Indians: they wanted to build a utopia in the new Spain that reflected the 'kingdom of God.' These religious figures "did not represent an alternative, but, rather, different modalities and different hierarchies of values in the exercise of colonial domination. For them as well, the Indian was an inferior being, an eternal minor, a soul to be saved in spite of himself, if necessary, and by whatever means available, including violence."[209] While the priests' ambitions, unlike those of the conquistadors, did not include gold and other precious metals, their elaborate aspirations demanded of the

[209] Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *Mexico Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*, trans. Philip A. Dennis (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 84.

Indigenous population the buildings of cathedrals, schools, and convents. Batalla highlights why the demands made of how the Indians in the name of the Church caused tension and eventually revolts:

> Indians in fact rebelled against the excessive work [they were asked to do] on religious buildings. Gibson relates that in 1557 the Indians of Teotihuacan burned the image of Saint Augustine and reacted violently against the Augustinians, who wanted to build a covenant that would require as much labor as had Acolman. The Indians demanded and achieved the return of the Franciscans, who were apparently less grandiose in their architectural ambitions.

Based on the records, we learn that it was members of the Franciscan order who showed the most respect toward the indigenous culture.

John Charles Chasteen in his book *Born in Blood & Fire* likewise notes that some of the Franciscan missionaries arriving in Mexico as early as 1524 showed respect to indigenous people and their culture, and made every effort to preserve their history, culture, wisdoms, and forms of spirituality. Chasteen claims that one of the most important individuals to have helped to preserve the Aztec culture was "Bernardino de Sahagun, who wrote [that] the Aztec family organization and child-care practices were superior to those of Spain. Sahagun collaborated with his indigenous students to assemble a treasure trove of Aztec thought, literature, and customs in their original language, Nahuatl."[210] These records known as the *Florentine Codex* give accurate information on the Aztec civilization and were used in the research for Chapter 2 to give a better understanding of the perspective of the Aztecs regarding the Fall of Tenochtitlan and the conquest of Mexico. Given that few Western religious figures showed solidarity with the Indigenous people, here I focus only on three individuals.

[210] John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood & Fire: A Concise History of Latin America* (New York: N. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 51.

The Spanish friar who is documented as being the first to speak against the injustices committed by his countrymen in the New World was the Dominican Antonio de Montesino. His sermon preached days before Christmas 1511 is now known as the initiation of a human rights campaign in favor of the indigenous population. Dussel writes that when Montesino was given the pulpit to speak in the Church of Santo Domingo, he spoke with authority to his countrymen: "Vox clamantis in deserto" began the preacher, using as his text John 1:23. "You are all living in mortal sin, and you will live and die in sin because of the cruelty and tyranny with which you abuse these innocent people.[211]" Justo Gonzalez likewise recognizes that "the Dominican Antonio de Montesinos was the first to protest against the mistreatment of the Indians, and particular against the encomiendas."[212] He is known for threatening to excommunicate from the Church those Spanish conquistadors whose actions towards the indigenous population deviated from Christian doctrine, even though European Church officials tolerated the oppressive state in the Spanish colonies. Montesinos is credited for influencing King Ferdinand in passing legal protection to the indigenous people. After receiving a preliminary report of the conditions in the New World, the Spanish Crown approved the Laws of Burgos a year later in December 27, 1512. Lissette Acosta Corniel in her chapter "Colonial Hispaniola: Fray Antonio de Montesinos and Spanish Women Rights," summarizes the proposed Laws in seven points, which give us a glimpse of the benefits given to the natives as well as the limitations imposed on them by the Laws:

> (1) Indians are free and they should be treated as such. (2) We have to work zealously in the conversion of the natives. (3) The King can order the Indians to work, but this and their assignment must be useful for them and the Republic. (4) The Indians should not suffer as a result of their labor and should have enough time to rest. (5) They should have

[211] Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America*, 47.

[212] Justo Gonzalez, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 58.

> a home and enough time to take care of it. (6) They should have communication with the Spaniards, in order to learn the Christian faith. (7) They should be paid conveniently, but with spices, not money.[213]

While formally it appears that Indigenous people received legal protection from the abusive treatment of the Spaniards, history tells us that the reality was quite different. The violence against the Indians would continue for five hundred years in spite of the passing of laws, but at the same time there would be the tedious legal work of protection of the rights of the indigenous populations based on Montesinos' work. His words of protests against a religious system that supported this oppressive treatment paved the way for the few others who chose to speak against it. One of the criticisms of Montesinos' work in the New World is of his silence regarding the treatment of women in the Spanish colony.

Acosta Corniel explains that during Montesino's time, "Spanish women in colonial Latin America struggled with [what we now call] their binary oppression as women and as human beings. While others living on the island of Hispaniola were treated on the basis of their human condition, Spanish women's treatment never became a topic of conversation amongst the patriarchal authorities of the island."[214] Acosta Corniel notes that, "Fray Antonio de Montesinos called the Spaniards to have compassion on the natives, yet Spanish women's human rights were largely neglected by the Catholic Church and by the dominant powers of patriarchal society that exercised oppressive control over Spanish women in late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Hispaniola."[215] If this was the case for Spanish women, I wonder about how indigenous women,

[213] Lissette Acosta Corniel, "Colonial Hispaniola: Fray Antonio de Montesinos and Spanish Women Rights," in *Montesinos' Legacy: Defining and Defending Human Rights for Five Hundred Years*, ed. Dana E. Aspinall (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 44.

[214] Acosta Corniel, "Colonial Hispaniola," 42.

[215] Acosta Corniel, "Colonial Hispaniola," 43.

who would be double marginalized for their gender and race category, were treated. These voices of protest clearly had blind spots and limitations in their activist approach.

The second figure is Friar Toribio of Benavente Motolinia, whose work among the Indians, in particular in Mexico, earned him the title of the "defender of the conquered."[216] Friar Motolinia was one of the "Twelve Franciscans who arrived in Mexico in 1524 to lay the foundations for the systematic evangelization of the country,"[217] but his missionary approach began to change as he came in contact with the indigenous population. If Liberation Theology emphasizes a preferential treatment for the poor, Motolinia's ministry paved the way for such a theological praxis five hundred years before Vatican Council II and the Conference of Medellin.

Francisco Morales in his article "The Native Encounter with Christianity: Franciscans and Nahuas in Sixteenth-Century Mexico" reminds us that the Franciscan order's vow of poverty made an impression on the natives in their first encounter. It is recorded that "When [the first Franciscans] arrived to this land of the Indies, walking on barefoot and wearing poor and patched habits, the Tlaxcalans began to exclaim, pointing at them, 'motolinia'a word which in the Mexican language means poor."[218] The Franciscans presented a completely different image to that of Spanish conquistadors, who deliberately showed off their grandeur and power to try and intimidate the indigenous people. When Fray Toribio heard the Tlaxcalans saying, "motolina," desiring to learn the language of the Indians (Nahuatl) he asked about its meaning. "And when

[216]Chasteen, *Born in Blood & Fire*, 51.

[217] Lino Canedo, "Toribío Motolinia and His Historical Writings," *The Americas* 29, no. 3 (January 1973): 277-307.

[218] Francisco Morales, "The Native Encounter with Christianity: Franciscans and Nahuas in Sixteenth-Century Mexico," *The Americas* 65, no. 2 (October 2008): 138.

he found out that it meant poor, Fray Torinio said: "this is the first word that I have learned from this language; from now on I will use it as my surname so I would not forget it."[219]

Motolinia would continue to advocate that his colleagues learn the Nahuatl language and the culture of the Indians before they attempted to convert them. Others before him had attempted to do so, but had been frustrated because their countrymen perceived the indigenous culture to be inferior and as there being nothing to learn from it. We see an example of this in the letter of Pedro de Gante to Philip II, who complained that the 'Indians' were "people without writing, without letters, without written characters, and without any kind of enlightenment. ("era gente sin escriptura, sin letras, sin caracteres y sin lumber de cosa alguna")."[220] Motolinia's approach was considered radical in light of the strategy of Christian and linguistic unification toward Muslims and Jews implemented on the Iberian Peninsula by the Spanish Crown ever since the Inquisition.[221] This tactic of learning the faith and the language would be expected in the Hispanization of the natives. According to Morales, "the language was only the first step toward mutual understanding: education was the cornerstone for building what the friars, by the second half of the sixteenth century, called 'La Iglesia Indiana,'" the Indian Church, as opposed to the post-Constantinian Church of the Spanish laymen and secular clergy, or what present scholars have called "The Nahuatlization of Christianity."[222]

Besides his pastoral work among the indigenous population, Friar Torinio Motolinia is also remembered for his writings regarding the pre-Hispanic culture in Mexico, writings that

[219] Morales, "The Native Encounter with Christianity," 138.

[220] Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 45.

[221] Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, 41.

[222] Morales, "The Native Encounter with Christianity,"145.

give us a better glimpse of Aztec civilization. His methodical ethnographic document entitled *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana* has helped us better understand the world of the Aztecs.

Perhaps one of Motolinia's limitations—which at times has also been true of some writings on Liberation Theology—is his interest in pre-Hispanic culture and tradition only as a methodology for evangelizing the indigenous people. While his legacy shows his continued interest in and compassion towards the Indians, it seems he was motivated only by the anticipation of the redemption of their communities. Even when documenting the Aztec forms of spirituality, we can recognize his Christian judgment in his pejorative description of some of their rituals and traditions as 'pagan.'

The last religious leader in this period who spoke in protest against the violent acts committed towards the indigenous population is Bartolome de Las Casas. He is perhaps the most popular figure mentioned by Liberation Theologians due to his defense of the 'Indians.' Most theologians believe his radical work five hundred years ago inspired the work of Liberation theologians throughout Latin America. One individual who was directly affected by his work was Bishop Samuel Ruiz of Chiapas, whom I discuss in detail towards the end of this chapter.

Bartolome de las Casas arrived on the American continent in 1502, seeking wealth and power like most Spaniards coming to the New World. He started as an *encomendero* himself in the Caribbean, with many indigenous people under him. Lewis Hanke in his book *All Mankind is One* writes that at first De las Casas did not seem to care about the exploitation of the indigenous population. After all, "he obtained Indian slaves, worked them in mines, and attended to the cultivation of his estates, which prospered."[223] Even though De Las Casas was familiar with the

[223] Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind is One: A Study of the Disputation Between Bartolome de Las Casas and Juan Gines de Sepulveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indians* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 7.

advocacy of Friar Montesinos, his message of protest against the Church and Spain had not yet reached him. Hake writes, "the sermon of Montesinos evidently did not disturb him, for in the next year, 1512, he participated in the conquest of Cuba and in 1513 received as a reward both land and an *ecomienda*."[224]

Only one year later in 1514, at forty years old De Las Casas began to rethink his stand on the matter of Indigenous rights, due in part to all the cruelties he was witnessing at the hand of Spanish conquistadors. Soon after, he questioned the very conquest of America and wondered if Spain had any right to invade the continent. He joined the Dominican order and returned to Spain in hopes of offering different ways to deal with the 'Indians.' Records show that in a sermon he questioned everything his country had done to the Indians. De las Casas argued that "the conquest itself was against all natural law and the law of Nations, as well as against all divine law…and consequently, null, void, and without any validity or legal effect."[225] Justo Gonzalez writes that on his return to Spain he "petitioned the crown to grant him land on the coast of Venezuela to establish a utopian settlement where he hoped the goodness and peaceful persuasion of Spanish farmers and priests would entice the Indians to conversion. Alas, his efforts failed largely because of not-so-peaceful Spaniards."[226]

During the 1520s and 1530s De Las Casas actively continued to try to persuade Spain by publishing different works that spoke against the abuses of the *encomiendas*. He eventually returned to the New World where he was named the Bishop of Chiapas. During this time he instituted some of his radical ideas of returning the land to the indigenous population and

[224] Hanke, *All Mankind is One,* 7.

[225] Bill Weinbert, *Homage to Chiapas: The New Indigenous Struggle in Mexico* (London: Verso, 2000), 20.

[226] Gonzalez and Gonzalez, *Christianity in Latin America,* 44.

requiring other missionaries to learn the language and the culture of the natives in order "to demonstrate his belief that the Indians could be converted peacefully."[227] In 1537, thanks to De las Casas's persistent role of "defender of the Indians," Pope Paul III in his Bull *Sublimis Deus* declared Indians to be people and not subhuman as had been argued since the 'Discovery' of America. In the 1540s, the Spanish Crown began to issue legal documents that would eventually help dissolve the controversial project of encomiendas—another contribution of De Las Casas. These laws were known as New Laws of the Indies for the Good Treatment and Preservation of the Indians. "The high-flying holders of *encomiendas* hated and vilified las Casas for the New Laws that clipped their wings, but the old crusader, already in his late sixties, had no intention of stopping."[228] To save his life, De Las Casas was forced to escape; he returned to Spain and eventually resigned from his post.

Of his continuing commitment to liberate the Indians from the oppression of the Spaniards and his own understanding of his divine purpose in the Americas he wrote, "[It was] by the goodness and mercy of God that I was called into His ministry which I did not merit, that I might attempt to protect those multitudes of peoples who are called Indians…from the unimaginable and unthinkable wrongs, evils, and injustices which we Spaniards inflicted upon them against all reason and justice."[229] De Las Casas is one for the first known religious figures within the Christian tradition in the modern era to use a theological framework to argue in political circles for the liberation of colonial subjects. Daniel Castro in his book *Another Face of Empire* argues that De Las Casas was the founder of a political movement whose visionary theology helped change culture and society five hundred years ago and continued to inspired

[227] Weinbert, *Homage to Chiapas*, 20.
[228] Chasteen, *Born in Blood & Fire*, 52.
[229] Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America*, 51.

others religious figures to do the same throughout the centuries. Casto noted: "Las Casas was more than a historian, jurist, theologian, or moralist; he was above all the head of a political movement and the organizer of an activist party—the only pro-Indian party in Spain and America that exerted a strong influence on Latin America's reality."[230]

In 1550, there was a famous dispute in Valladolid, Spain, between Las Casas and Sepulveda in which De Las Casas refuted the arguments that Indians are barbarous and without a soul and that the war against them was justified since they had no rights. If the Spaniards had been shocked by the human sacrifices of the Aztecs and argued from the beginning for the extermination of those savages, in this argument Las Casas shocked his opponents with his statement that "Spaniards in their treatment of the Indians have surpassed all other barbarians in the savagery of their behavior."[231] This was a scandalous yet truthful argument made against European civilization. De Las Casas' main argument was that the Indians were rational beings and peaceful human beings capable of learning Christian doctrines, quite the opposite of what had been stated about them earlier in the 'Discovery of America.' While the judges listening to the dispute never reached a consensus, public opinion continued to be divided regarding the treatment of the Indians. Yet until his death De Las Casas continued to advocate for a legal framework to protect the indigenous peoples of the New World.

De las Casas' writings were more effective than his oral arguments in the Valladolid dispute in helping expose the injustices in the New World during his lifetime and beyond. Over and over, he concluded that the actions of his countryman should be condemned and that their behavior and views were not supported by Christian doctrine. In one of his writings to the King

[230] Daniel Castro, *Another Face of Empire: Bartolomé de Las Casas, Indigenous Rights, and Ecclesiastical Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 151.

[231] Hanke, *All Mankind is One,* 83.

of Spain, De las Casas wrote: "There is no language, no art or humane science, that can avail to recite the abominable crimes and bloody actions committed by these enemies not only of Common-wealth's, but of all humane societies; neither can any diligence, or time or writing sufficiently aggravate the circumstances of these detestable deeds."[232] De Las Casas' book, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* described many of these atrocities in detail, giving his readers a graphic account of how the Spanish had actually treated the indigenous population. Overall, De Las Casas is remembered for his affection for the most vulnerable members of the Spanish colonies and his protest against the oppressive systems there. His work inspired many other religious figures in Latin America to speak out against the injustices, specifically figures in the Liberation theology movement. For example, one of the earliest voices of Liberation Theology, Gustavo Gutierrez, wrote concerning De Las Casas' legacy, "Among those with the keenest interest in Bartolomé de Las Casas today are Latin America's liberation theologians, who have recognized in the Dominican friar a prophetic forerunner of the church's radical 'option of the poor."[233]

Even though De Las Casas is esteemed as being at the forefront of what became Liberation Theology for his work among the indigenous population, his legacy would forever be tainted by his proposals in alleviating the burden of the 'Indians' from his own countrymen. He wrote to the Spanish Crown in his work *Historia de Las Indias*: "como venido el rey a reinar tuvo mucho favor (…) y los remedios de estas tierras se le pusieron en las manos, alcanzó del rey que para libertar a los indios se concediese a los españoles de estas islas que pudiesen llevar de

[232] Bartolome De Las Casas, *The Tears of the Indians*, trans. John Phillips (Stanford: Academic Reprints, 2015), 521.

[233] Gustavo Gutierrez, "Foreword," *Witness: Writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas* edited by George Sanderlin (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), xi.

castilla algunos negros esclavos. Determino el Consejo que debía dares licencia para que pudiesen llevar 4,000"[234] (since the king, in coming to reign had much favor (...) and the remedies of these lands were put into his hands, it became possible for the king, in order to free the Indians, to grant that the Spaniards of these islands could take some black slaves from Castile. The Council determined that they should be allowed to take 4,000). Critics of his request to replace the natives with African slaves argued that that his request contributed to the African slave trade in the Americas.

Defenders of De Las Casas argued that his reference is to legal slaves in Spain who had been converted to the Catholic faith, a country in which there were laws to protect slaves, even though they were not enforced. Robert L. Brady writes:

> When Negroes began to arrive in Spain in the fifteenth century, their adaptability facilitated their incorporation into the established society of Spain. They accepted the Catholic Faith with good will and were accepted on the same terms as family servants native to the peninsula. Within the legal framework of the Siete Partidas, Negroes earned their freedom, occasionally married outside of their race, and in some instances became the heirs of masters who adopted them…This was the slavery which Las Casas was condoning for the Indies. It was both humane and terminable.[235]

In reality, no form of slavery is humane. And even if his argument were credible, no one can deny that by bringing legal African slaves to the Americas De Las Casas opened the markets and demonstrated the profitability of slavery for the Spanish conquistadors. Enrique Krauze best captures the controversial legacy of this defender of the Indians: "La humanidad es Una, habia proclamado fray Bartolomé…con excepcion de los africanos. Su legado es la Gloria de haber sido 'el Protector de los Indios' y la infamy y de haber traído a los priumeros esclavos negros a

[234] Krauze, *Redentores,* 458.

[235] Robert L. Brady, "The Role of Las Casas in the Emergence of Negro Slavery in the New World," *Revista de Historia de America,* no. 61/62 (Enero-Diciembre 1966): 47, accessed October 1, 2019, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41307332.

la America Española."[236] ("Humanity is One, Fray Bartholomew had proclaimed...with the exception of the Africans. His legacy is the Glory of having been 'the Protector of the Indians' and the infamy of having brought the first black slaves to Spanish America).

In emphasizing the courageous actions of these religious leaders who dedicated themselves to denouncing the atrocities and violence committed against the Indigenous people in the construction of the Spanish colonies, I recall that the trend within Christianity of a theological and political activism that gave birth to Liberation theology and would inspire movements like the EZLN began over five hundred years ago. Dussel recognizes the contributions of religious figures like De Las Cassas when he says, "the lives of these pastors should serve as an example for bishops of our era where the majority of violence is inflicted—as in the time of the conquistadores—by 'men of arms." [237] Dussel's comment compels us to continue to look to other heroic religious leaders who risked everything and even their lives to liberate the most vulnerable members of society.

II. Revolutionary Faith: The Use of Redemptive Violence in the Efforts of Liberating the Indigenous Population from the Colonial Matrix in Mexico

Continuing with the previous approach of analyzing historical figures whose actions demonstrated the role of religion in the struggle of the indigenous population in America, I turn now to two distinct religious leaders, again within the Christian tradition, whose redemptive work among the most vulnerable members of Mexican society compelled them to organize and arm themselves in order to bring liberation to their parishioners. I am referring to Roman Catholic priests Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla and Jose Maria Morelos y Pavón, whose

[236] Krauze, *Redentores,* 458.
[237] Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America,* 51.

unconventional approach in their ministry sparked a successful revolt (even though they never saw their efforts come to fruition), which concluded with the Independence of Mexico, after centuries of Spanish colonialism. For some reason, these religious figures are rarely associated with the Liberation Theology movement, perhaps for three reasons: first, the historical timeline of their ministry in the eighteenth century (which shouldn't be a reason due to the constant reference to Bartolome De Las Casas hundreds of years earlier); second, the lack of published documents in this field from Hidalgo and Morelos, who may not have been recognized as intellectuals even though they had the proper theological training, yet whose praxis of liberation has had more of an impact than some of the publications of contemporary Liberation theologians; and third, their unorthodox methodology of ministry and the use of redemptive violence which has perhaps deterred some who want this field to speak against injustice but would promote a more pacifist approach from associating them with the work of Liberation Theology.

The names of Hidalgo and Morales are mentioned throughout Mexico every year on the evening of September 15 during the reenactment of "El Grito," which is part of the Independence Day celebrations in which Mexican people commemorate "El Grito de Dolores" (The Cry of Dolores), an event that occurred in Dolores, Hidalgo (Mexico) on the morning of September 16, 1810 when Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla rang the bell of his parish in order call his congregants to arm themselves and revolt against the Spanish authorities.

In his book *Redentores*, Krauze recognizes the impact of religion in the struggle of the indigenous population and the poorest members of Mexican society: "No es casual que Hidalgo y Morelos, los heroes de la Independencia Mexicana, hayan sido sacerdotes, ni que sus ejércitos, al menos en las primeras etapas de la Guerra, fuesen indígenas" (It is no coincidence that

Hidalgo and Morelos, the heroes of Mexican Independence, were priests, nor that their armies, at least in the early stages of the war, were indigenous).[238] It's noticed that if their theological work were interjected with the challenges experienced by their congregants, more of their work would be mentioned in this section. However, I first want to point out how their redemptive work in the nineteenth century was acknowledged by the Zapatista movement, who mentioned Hidalgo and Morales by name when the movement introduced itself to the world on January 1, 1994. This tells me that even though the EZLN does not identify itself as a religious movement, they recognize the work of liberation among the indigenous communities in Mexico.[239]

Revisiting the colonial period in Latin America, Chasteen claims that Mexico was the prize possession of the Spanish Crown, "vastly the most profitable colony"[240] of the entire continent. During this time, *Casta* or the caste system had been instituted not only to differentiate between races but also as a way of building a new society. Unfortunately, the indigenous population, the 'inheritors of the true builders of our nation,' would continue to be ostracized from this process. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla recounts how the land was distributed: "the country was dominated by haciendas and ranches, which had displaced Indian agriculture. They were in

[238] Krauze, *Redentores,* 439.

[239] "We are the inheritors of the true builders of our nation. The dispossessed, we are millions and we thereby call upon our brothers and sisters to join this struggle as the only path, so that we will not die of hunger due to the insatiable ambition of a 70-year dictatorship led by a clique of traitors that represent the most conservative and sell-out groups. They are the same ones that opposed Hidalgo and Morelos, the same ones that betrayed Vicente Guerrero, the same ones that sold half our country to the foreign invader, the same ones that imported a European prince to rule our country, the same ones that formed the "scientific" Porfirsta dictatorship, the same ones that opposed the Petroleum Expropriation, the same ones that massacred the railroad workers in 1958 and the students in 1968, the same ones the today take everything from us, absolutely everything. First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle," accessed September 29, 2019, http://woocommerce-180730-527864.cloudwaysapps.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/1st-Declaration-of-the-Lacandona-Jungle.pdf.

[240] Chasteen, *Born in Blood & Fire,* 102.

the hands of creoles and rich mestizos."[241] Even though creoles (Spaniards born in the Americas) appeared to be in charge, the ones with real control of Mexican society were the *peninsulares*, the Spaniards "who came across the Atlantic with royal appointments."[242]

Unfortunately for the indigenous people, Mexico as a country was being formed in the image of Spanish society. Ben Vinson III in his book *Before Mestizaje* states that *casta* was part of the imperial project used by the Spanish with the purpose of claiming superiority over all people in the New World based on their origins, including the natives of the land. Nonetheless this system of categorization eventually reached its culmination at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the effort started by Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla in 'El Grito de Dolores.' Vinson writes, "from September 16, 1810, when the insurgency movement that led to Mexican independence began, until the early 1820s, the individuals who fought not only for political liberty but also for the end of a social order…had tried to control vast population groups by maintaining a caste-based hierarchy."[243]

Father Miguel Hidalgo was a Creole himself, born in 1753 in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico. He received theological training in Valladolid, Spain, where he was influenced by the Jesuit order. Many argue that Hidalgo 'had more in common with most Peninsulares, his social peers, than with his indigenous parishioners."[244] But throughout his ministry, he identified himself with the struggle of the community he served. Chasteen describes Hidalgo as "a reader of banned French books who also studied indigenous languages and defied the Catholic rule of sexual abstinence for clergy, Hidalgo was an impulsive nonconformist."[245] At the same time,

[241] Batalla, *Mexico Profundo*, 94.
[242] Batalla, *Mexico Profundo*, 94.
[243] Vinson, *Before Mestizaje*, 182.
[244] Chasteen, *Born in Blood & Fire*, 103.
[245] Chasteen, *Born in Blood & Fire*, 102.

prior to the uprising Hidalgo had been "recognized as 'one of the best theologians in his diocese,' 'a man deeply versed in literature and with a very broad range of knowledge in all areas."[246] After graduating from seminary he had taught for ten years at the Colegio de San Nicolas, where he eventually became the Rector of the school. After his appointment at the seminary, he was assigned to a wealthy parish of Felipe Torres Mochas. There, his restless intellect put him in conflict with the Church officials. Complaints about Hidalgo's teachings began categorizing him almost as a heretic, but he was never charged since he enjoyed the protection of some of his superiors.

After a few years in parish ministry, and seeing the inequalities in his community, Hidalgo decided to conspire against those in power—the *peninsulares*—in hopes of returning power to the people of Mexico. Without military training, he decided to organize his congregation for battle. "He was acting 'on the authority of my nation'; he had been chosen 'by the Mexican nation to defend its rights'; and he would seek the restitution of 'the holy rights granted by God to the Mexicans, usurped by cruel, bastards and unjust conquerors."[247] On the evening of September 15, 1810 the community of Dolores heard a bell ring. It was Father Miguel Hidalgo, calling his parishioners to come together in order to overthrow the ruling system. Bearing a standard depicting the Virgin of Guadalupe, Dolores "delivered his famous cry (the grito): "Death to the Spaniards! Long Live the Virgin of Guadalupe."[248] That day, the most excluded members of Mexican society stalked through the streets with sticks, stones, and any object they could find and applied justice by sacking businesses and robbing and killing Spanish

[246] Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power: A History of Modern Mexico 1810–1996*, trans. Hank Heiftez (New York: Harper Hochhauser Orenstein, 1998), 93.

[247] Krauze, *Mexico*, 96.

[248] Krauze, *Mexico*, 96.

men. To some, Hidalgo caused a chaotic scene while to others, his cry sparked a movement that, according to Vinson, "swelled to include nearly 60,000 Indians and those of mixed-race castes, [who] quickly reinterpreted his *grito* as a cry for ending all-white rule and its accompanying caste disparities."[249]

After only a few months of insurgent life, Hidalgo was arrested and tried for his treacherous acts against the Spanish Crown. Before his execution on July 30, 1811, Hidalgo was defrocked and stripped of his priestly robes. His enemies found on his body the image of 'La Virgen de Guadalupe,' the same symbolic figure used to inspire thousands to revolt in his parish but also a powerful reminder of who is the Mother of the Mexican nation. Without military experience, Hidalgo had used his religiosity to address the injustice of Mexican society and to inspire change. Krauze explains that Hidalgo "knew of no way to ignite the war other than the one he put into effect: using the prestige of his priesthood to appeal to the elemental passion of his Indian parishioners, among them plunder and revenge."[250]

Even though Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla never got an opportunity to see the repercussion of his rebellious acts, still today he is remembered as the Father of Mexican Independence and as 'the Servant of the Nation,' a name he designated for himself based on his readings of the Gospel of Mark. There are some who would be critical of his violent approach to bringing liberation to his people. Jose Herrera Peña in his book *Una Nación, Un Pueblo, Un Hombre* perhaps gives the best explanation for Hidalgo's approach when he writes:

> Hay quienes lo censuran por haber preferido el terror en lugar de la diplomacia. Hubieran querido verlo arrojando flores—no metralla—al enemigo. Sin embargo, la actitiud del rector del Coloegio de San Nicolás, mas que criticable, es sorprendente y admirable. Si los peninsulares no tenían más lenguaje que el de la fuerza para hacerse entender y obedecer, era imperative responderles en su propio lenguaje. La fuerza, en condiciones

[249] Vinson, *Before Mestizaje*, 182.
[250] Krauze, *Mexico*, 97.

> dadas, es el único element legitimador de un sitema politico y jurídico que se niega a seguir dependiendo de otro. Si la vieja ley Española era la expression de la fuerza opresora, la nueva fuerza Americana tendría que ser Fuente de la nueva ley liberadora.[251] (There are those who censure him for having preferred terror over diplomacy. They would have liked to see him throwing flowers—not shrapnel—to the enemy. However, the activity of the rector of the College of St. Nicholas is more surprising and admirable than reprehensible. If the Peninsulares had no other language than that of force to make themselves understood and obeyed, it was imperative to respond to them in their own language. Strength, under certain conditions, is the only legitimate element of a political and legal system that refuses to continue depending on another. If the old Spanish law was the expression of oppressive force, the new American force would have to be the Source of the new liberating law).

Hidalgo's call for an armed insurgency against the Spanish colonial authorities would be questioned by some for using theological concepts to justify his violent actions. Throughout his writings, Hidalgo defended his belief in a God who gave to all humanity basic rights which should be respected regardless of their race or class. His willingness to engage in a fight until the most vulnerable members of Mexican society, including the indigenous population, enjoyed those rights was evident in his short military career. Regarding the commitment of his army to continue in the struggle, Hidalgo wrote to one of his comrades, Ignacio Jose de Allende, "estan resueltos a no entrar en composicion alguna que no ponga for pase la libertad de la nacion y el goce de aquellos que el Dios de la naturaleza concedio a todos los hombres; derechos verdaderamente inalienables y que deben sostenerse con rios de sangre si fuere preciso."[252] (They are determined not to enter into any composition which does not allow for the freedom of the nation and the enjoyment of those things the God of nature has granted to all men; truly inalienable rights which must be sustained by rivers of blood if necessary). For many years after Hidalgo's death, the Church not only prohibited any talk of Hidalgo and his revolutionary actions, but actively punished those who transgressed. To this day historians are not even sure

[251] Jose Herrera Peña, *Una Nación, Un Pueblo, Un Hombre* (Morelia: Icadep, 2008), 114.
[252] Herrera Peña, *Una Nación, Un Pueblo, Un Hombre*, 230.

what Don Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla looked like, even though there are many portraits of him that honor him for his work. Although the Spanish elite continue to try to erase him from history, his direct contributions to the lives of the people of Mexico ensure they will remember him forever.

Another religious figure whose theological praxis led him to join an armed movement for the sake of the oppressed indigenous people lived in the same period as Hidalgo. In comparison, Jose Maria Morelos y Pavon was a mestizo, and from a much humbler background. Born in 1765, he grew up seeing the disparities and suffering of the colonial project in Spain. His desire for learning led him to enroll at the Colegio de San Nicolas in 1789. Don Miguel Hidalgo was the Rector at that time. According to Krauze, he chose to study grammar but eventually switched to pursue a life in ministry; apparently "profound religious faith but also economic necessity brought him to the priesthood."[253] His first assignment led Father Morelos to minister to the poorest members of his community in Michoacán. Krauze describes Morelos as harsh and inpatient with the 'Indians' since he expected them to work. At the same time he had a compassionate heart for the sick members of his congregation. Morelos' expectations of his parishioners were high; he wanted them all to be productive members of society.

When Napoleon and the French army invaded Spain in 1808, Morelos expressed his desire to go and defend his country and the Catholic faith. Two years later, everything changed when he learned that his influential professor Don Miguel Hidalgo was leading a revolt against the *peninsulares*. It was not easy to change his ideology of first wanting to defend Spain to defending the poorest members of Mexican society, but after a conversation with Hidalgo in the town of Valladolid, Morelos understood what the real struggle was and "accepted the

[253] Krauze, *Mexico*, 103.

responsibility of raising the revolution in the south. He was forty-five years old."[254] Morelos became a successful general in the insurgent army. "He drew inspiration from the Military Instructions of Prussia's Frederick the Great and, above all, from his own practical skills. He carefully chose his lieutenants—the Galeana brothers and the Bravo brothers—from among the mestizo rancheros of the southern mountain region. And a sense of order governed every action Morelos took."[255] His years of pastoral work were soon forgotten as he continued to be involved in the fight for independence.

Morelos is remembered not only for his revolutionary actions but also for his political framework that contributed to the forging of a new nation. His most recognized work is *Sentimientos de la Nación,* in which he established the basic principles of sovereignty for Mexico. The book includes a declaration of independence of Mexico from Spain or any other nation. "Que la América es libre e independiente de España y de toda otra Nación, Gobierno o Monarquía, y que así se sancione, dando al mundo las razones." [256] (That America is free and independent of Spain and of any other nation, government or monarchy, and that thus be it sanctioned, giving the world its reasons.) Perhaps one of the most contentious ideas that Morelos promoted was the establishment of the Catholic faith as the official religion of Mexico.[257]

In one of the many battles fought against the loyal troops of the Spanish Crown, Morelos was captured. He was eventually taken back to Mexico City where he was tried, condemned, and executed. Before his death, the Church officials defrocked him and revoked all his priestly

[254] Krauze, *Mexico,* 106.
[255] Krauze, *Mexico,* 106.
[256] José María Morelos, "Sentimientos de la Nacion 1813," Museo de las Constituciones, accessed October 3, 2019, http://museodelasconstituciones.unam.mx/nuevaweb/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Sentimientos-de-la-Nacio%CC%81n-1813.pdf.
[257] "Que la Religión Católica sea la única, sin tolerancia de otras." José María Morelos, "Sentimientos de la Nación 1813."

privileges. Krauze recounts the words Morelos heard, "We take from you the power to offer the sacrifice of God and to celebrate mass…With this unfrocking we take from you the power you received through the anointing of hands…we deprive you…we remove you from office, we degrade you, we strip you…we cast you out, like an ungrateful son, from the inheritance of the Lord."[258] The next day, Morelos was executed by firing squad. Yet his legacy continues. Krauze underlines that for Morelos the revolutionary effort made by his troops was not only to gain independence. To Morelos it was "in the Christian sense of the term, a *mission*." Even the great Latin American figure Simón Bolívar recognized the strange combination of religion and politics used by Moelos and his mentor Hidalgo because in his work *Doctrina del Libertador* 1815 he wrote, "Fortunately the leaders of the independence struggle in Mexico have put fanaticism to use by proclaiming the famous Virgin of Guadalupe as the queen of the patriots, praying to her in times of hardship and displaying her on their flags. In this way, political enthusiasm has been mixed with religion to produce a vehement fervor of the sacred cause of liberty."[259]

Many decades after Hidalgo's call to arms and Morelos' leadership in the Independence War of Mexico, other religious figures likewise advocated for redemptive violence in order to bring liberation to the oppressed members of society. Most liberation theologians mentioned names like that of Colombian Catholic priest Camilo Torres who, after his ordination in 1954, became a guerrilla combatant. He died in 1966, an inspiration to other religious leaders who chose to take up arms. Yet no one could deny that what Hidalgo and Morelos did in the nineteenth century was revolutionary but also paved the way for Liberation theologians to play a

[258] Krauze, *Mexico*, 116.

[259] Simón Bolívar, *Doctrina del Libertador*, ed. Augusto Mijares (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayahucho, 1979), 73-74.

more direct role in the defense of the Indigenous population throughout Latin America by integrating religion and politics.

III. The Rebel Priest: The Role of Liberation Theology in the Ministry of Bishop Samuel Ruiz and the Link to the Zapatista Movement.

The last religious figure to which I turn in this chapter is perhaps the most well-known person in Chiapas since he was not only a contemporary with the EZLN but played a significant role in supporting the movement from its early stages until his own death on January 24, 2011. In this section, I explain how the ministry in Chiapas of Bishop Samuel Ruiz or el Tata Ruiz "Tatic" (as he was known by the Mayan community, a word that means 'father' in Tzeltal), was affected by two issues: first, the cruel conditions to which the indigenous population had been subjected historically in the region and which the EZLN fought to reverse; and second, the consciousness created after the Medellín Conference in 1968 by the Liberation Theology movement. As a result of this, Bishop Samuel Ruiz developed a theological praxis that created the environment for Mayan communities to organize and revolt, even though he did not approve of the methodology they adopted.

Bishop Samuel Ruiz did not start as a rebel. Ruiz was born into a modest Catholic family in Guanajuato, Mexico on November 3, 1924. After completing his high school education, Ruiz attended the Seminary at León in Guanajuato. He was ordained to the ministry in 1949 after finishing his studies at the Gregorian University in Rome. His academic emphasis was in philosophy and theology. Ruiz had the opportunity to go and study in Jerusalem before he returned to Mexico where he then took his first assignment as a professor of the Leon Seminary in Guanajuato. Ruiz was known for his linguistic ability; he spoke many languages including Latin, Greek, Hebrew, English, French, German, and Italian. Up till this point in his life, his

loyalty to the orthodox theology of the Catholic Church would not have been questioned. Soon after his first assignment, he was asked to become the Rector of the seminary where he taught for a few years.

However, at the age of thirty-five Ruiz was named bishop of San Cristobal De Las Casas in the state of Chiapas. This marked a turning point in his career since he had no pastoral experience. As he stepped into his responsibilities in the diocese of Chiapas, Ruiz began to notice the conflict of ideas to do with the disparities in his community. One recognizes his conservative views in the political realm in a statement he made regarding the topic of social justice, which was constantly discussed in his territory: "Behind a creed that flaunts a banner of social justice, communism has been sneaking in falsehoods, hypocrisy, deceit, and calumny."[260] Not long after this, his views started to evolve as he met his parishioners in their own environment and saw a different reality.

In order to get to know his community and the needs of his congregants, Bishop Samuel Ruiz decided to visit every town and village. Since there were not always roads, he took a mule as a means of transportation. The diocese of San Cristobal was composed of the entire state of Chiapas (29,600 square miles). Ruiz took narrow roads, climbed mountains, and traversed forests in order to accomplish his goal. In each settlement, the only consistent theme was the conditions of extreme poverty facing the indigenous population. Gary MacEoin writes regarding Ruiz's first encounters: "What most impressed and shocked the bishop…was the poverty and abandonment in which the indigenous lived. It was something for which his previous experience had not prepared him. But it was something, he quickly concluded, that was essentially opposed to God's

[260] Gary MacEoin, *The People's Church* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 20.

will for all humans."[261] The suffering of his parishioners not only shaped his pastoral outreach but soon also transformed his theology. These were the very same circumstances of which Subcomandante Marcos spoke that drove the EZLN to revolt[262] against the Federal government and to which the indigenous population in Chiapas was more susceptible than others. Ruiz saw the abuses of the wealthy owners of the land towards the indigenous people and decided that if God intended something different for his parishioners, he would have to do something different for them.

> On his return to San Cristobal, Bishop Ruiz developed his first pastoral plan, beginning with the acculturation of the indigenous people. As did the strategy of the early missionaries, so too his strategy had many limitations. In his autobiography he explored possible solutions he might implement.
>
> If fallait d'abord imposer l'enseignment de l'espagnol à tous, car comment évangeliser s'il y avait au moins cinq langues sur ce territoire, dérivées de l'ancienne langue maya? Il fallait aussi faire disparaître la pauvreté, ou réduire son impact, par une amelioration de l'agriculture a fin que les indigènes pussent augmenter leurs revenus, et donc améliorer leur alimentation. La devise était: "Il faut enseigner le castilla, il faut chausser les Indiens et il faut leur donner à manger. C'était mes trois lignes pastorals d'action.[263] ("First of all, we had to impose the teaching of Spanish on everyone, because how could we evangelize when at least five languages were spoken in this territory, all derived from the ancient Mayan language? It was also necessary to eradicate poverty, or reduce its impact, by improving agriculture so that the natives could increase their income and thus improve their diet. The motto was: "You have to teach Castilla [Spanish], you have to give shoes to the Indians, and you have to feed them. These were my three lines of pastoral action.")

[261] MacEoin, *The People's Church*, 222.

[262] "We have been denied the most elemental preparation so they can use us as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country. They don't care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads, no land, no work, no health care, no food nor education." General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, "First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle," *Schools for Chiapas*, accessed September 29, 2019, https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/1st-Declaration-of-the-Lacandona-Jungle.pdf.

[263] Samuel Ruiz, *Comment Les Indiens M'ont Converti* (Paris: Les Editions de L'Atelier, 2002), 22–23.

In the early stages of his ministry in Chiapas, Bishop Samuel Ruiz followed what other religious figures has done: he attempted to convert the indigenous people. In his fervor to educate the different communities, he opened a school, taught the catechism, and encouraged the speaking of Spanish language among the indigenous communities. Decades later, Ruiz regretted this traditional approach to conversion and confessed, "Vine a San Cristóbal para convertir a los pobres, pero son ellos los que han acabado por convertirme."[264] (I came to San Cristobal to indoctrinate the poor, but it was they who converted me). During this era, Ruiz collaborated with others in the Dominican order to support the efforts of evangelism in the area. To this point, the conversion of the indigenous population was the main focus of the young Samuel Ruiz's ministry. It took another major event for him to see how faith and politics relate to one another.

The more important turning point in the ministry of Bishop Ruiz occurred after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). This was a time in which the Catholic Church was searching to evolve and be relevant to the modern challenges facing its members around the world. Most importantly, the Church re-committed to working with the most vulnerable members of society, in so doing moving away from their constant quest for power. This was a new era; the poor were now the focus and the sole responsibility of the Church. Miguel De La Torre writes regarding this period, "These revolutionary changes in Rome that shifted the Church's focus to the poor stimulated, encouraged, emboldened, and justified those who had been for some time moving toward a theology rooted in the Latin American experience. The question they now had to wrestle with was how to contextualize Vatican II in Latin America."[265]

[264] John Womack, *Chiapas, El Obispo de San Cristóbal y la Revuelta Zapatista*, trans. Enedina Ramos (Mexico: Cal y Arena, 1998), 49.

[265] Miguel A. De La Torre, *Liberation Theology for Armchair Theologians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 32–33.

A few hundred bishops who had represented Latin America at Vatican Council II, on their return to their own communities began to search for ways to incorporate and live out the discussed topics within the Latin American context. Several Latin American bishops encouraged the Church to change its strategy. In addition, Brazilian priest Dom Hélder Câmara gathered with eighteen bishops from different countries of the Global South to write to Pope Paul VI, stating that "the peoples of the Third World are the proletariats of humanity today. They are exploited by the great nations…History shows us that certain revolutions were necessary, and that they have produced good effects."[266] The desperate need for change prompted the religious leaders of Latin America to organize, even absent the direct support of the Vatican.

In 1968, there was a more intentional attempt by the bishops of Latin America to develop a strategy to address the challenges facing the Church with the gathering of the general conference of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), also known as the Medellín Conference since it was held in Medellín, Colombia. The theme of the Conference was "The Church in the Present-Day: Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council." In this gathering there were many discussions regarding the political turmoil of Latin America, the oppressive conditions of the members of the Church, and the need to speak up against the subjugation of the most vulnerable members of society. There were many presentations addressing the role of the Church in the context of Latin America. One of the presenters was Bishop Samuel Ruiz, who was assigned the topic of evangelism and the spreading of God's word. Ruiz spoke from his experience visiting his parishioners in Chiapas, "Los pobres no pueden ser evangelizados si nosotros somos propietarios de latifundios; los débiles y los oprimidos se alejan de Cristo si nosotros aparecemos como aliados de los poderosos; los

[266] De La Torre, *Liberation Theology for Armchair Theologians*, 37.

analfabetas no podrán ser evangelizados si nuestras instituciones religiosas siguen buscando el paraíso de las grandes ciudades, y no los suburbios y las aldeas desheredadas."[267] (The poor cannot be evangelized if we are the owners of large estates. The weak and oppressed turn away from Christ if we appear as allies of the powerful. The illiterate cannot be evangelized if our religious institutions continue to seek the paradise of the great cities, and not the suburbs and disinherited villages.) Ruiz's presentation moved the committee; it later assigned him the role of president of missions of the conference for the next years. Bishop Ruiz would turn out to be not only a great presenter but also a great organizer.

Gary MacEoin writes that after 1968 the mood changed and the intermingling of religion and politics was more noticed as the Latin American bishops committed to speaking out against the system of oppression. "At Medellín the Latin American bishops were denouncing the institutionalization of violence of 'international monopolies and the international imperialism of money,"[268] a bold move, which would create tension within the leadership of the Church, particularly among older leaders who did not want to go as far as naming the causes of poverty and oppression. Yet, in spite of the disapproval of some, the conference spawned sixteen documents on two major themes. The first five documents dealt with the topic of "human life and societal issues,"[269] while the other eleven dealt with the "inner life of the church and what the church must do in order to reach various groups with its message."[270] The fourteenth document is mostly remembered for the focus on the topic of poverty, which, it argued is comprised of three types: material poverty, spiritual poverty, and a voluntary poverty, the latter

[267] Womack, *Chiapas,* 55.
[268] MacEoin, *The People's Church,* 25.
[269] Gonzalez and Gonzalez, *Christianity in Latin America,* 247.
[270] Gonzalez and Gonzalez, *Christianity in Latin America,* 247.

being "a commitment, through which one assumes voluntarily and lovingly the conditions of the needy of the world in order to bear witness to the evil which it represents and to spiritual liberty in the face of material goods."[271]

While there are different perspectives on Liberation Theology, most people could agree that the starting point of theological reflection was the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed. Compared to traditional Eurocentric Christian theology, Liberation Theology calls the Church to address the systems of oppression and to engage in the liberation of others. Those who attended the Medellín Conference responded with the following statement: "The Latin American bishops cannot remain indifferent in the face of the tremendous social injustices existing in Latin America, which keep the majority of our peoples in dismal poverty, which in many cases becomes inhuman wretchedness."[272] Many argue that the Medellín Conference marked the birth of Liberation theology. This theological process was different; for the first time it formulated a response to poverty and suffering based on biblical perspectives to the sociopolitical within the context of Latin America.

On returning to the Chiapas, Bishop Ruiz began radically to change his approach to ministry. During past visits to parishioners in his diocese, Ruiz had made a habit of staying with wealthy landowners and from there he would administer the sacraments to his members who would come from the surrounding villages. At Medellín, the bishops had committed to give preference to the poor, and for Ruiz this meant adjusting his pastoral practices. From then on,

[271] Gonzalez and Gonzalez, *Christianity in Latin America,* 247.

[272] Latin American Episcopal Council, "Medellin Document: Poverty of the Church," *Poverty Studies*, September 6, 1969, accessed October 13, 2019, http://www.povertystudies.org/TeachingPages/EDS_PDFs4WEB/Medellin%20Document-%20Poverty%20of%20the%20Church.pdf.

when visiting his parishioners, he would stay in the homes of his regular congregants. This both helped him understand their suffering and at the same time angered the rich people.

> In switching sides, Don Samuel was undoubtedly influenced by his study of the sixteenth-century predecessor who had given his name to the diocese, Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas. To show his disapproval of the misdeeds of the Spaniards, Fray Bartolomé had forbidden his friars to stay or eat at their homes or to give absolution to *comenderos* or to any Spaniards unwilling to return land or goods they had robbed. The friars, he said, should stay in the huts of the indigenous.[273]

Another radical change in his approach towards the indigenous communities was the implementation of their original languages and eventually their culture in the worship programs and the implementation of the Sacraments. Ruiz not only learned the two most common Mayan languages, Tzeltal and Tzotzil, but also worked to have the Bible translated into Tzeltal and Chol so that his parishioners could understand the will of God for their life within their own cultural context. At the same time, Ruiz began to include different Mayan languages during mass and as he offered the sacraments. This was a reversal of colonial tradition, which had associated Christianity with the Spanish language. Also, he began to ordain indigenous deacons. This was only the beginning of many more changes to come.

The early 1970s were chaotic in the political realm. The country continued to wrestle with the student massacre of Tlateltolco in 1968. Land would be one of the biggest issues in Chiapas, with President Luis Echeverría subdividing and splitting the Lacandon jungle in Chiapas by almost 50 percent and transferring ownership to the 'Lacandon tribe' consisting of only sixty-six families while displacing four thousand other families in the process. Though the government established an office to manage this transition, tension continued to mount. For a while it seemed that decisions were being made out of concern for the indigenous community.

[273] MacEoin, *The People's Church,* 27.

But when locals noticed that the government was profiting from the natural resources of the jungle, the responses by the locals turned violent. In the meantime, Bishop Ruiz continued to work diligently with the dioceses in hopes of creating awareness of the rights of the indigenous people affected by all these policy changes.

The Bible studies became political conversations in which parishioners searched for biblical answers to the situation in the region. The new catechism classes created by Mayan members of the diocese changed focus in order to address the dilemmas facing the different communities. An appropriate title was given to these studies, 'Buscamos la Libertad' (We sought liberty) inspired in part by the Exodus story in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. I quote a portion to give a glimpse of how it raised the people's consciousness regarding their role in Mexican politics:

> Dios quiere que salgamos a la libertad como el antiguo pueblo judío, que vivía en tierras de otro pueblo, llamado Egipto. Trabajaban como esclavos sufriendo muchas necesidades. Entonces Dios habló en el corazón de uno de los principals, 'He bajado para liberarlos de los sufrimientos y los voy a llevar a otras tierras mejores.' Cuando los israelitas vivían como esclavos, tuvieron que salir y pelear y consequir su libertad. Cuando nuestros antepasados vivían como mozos, también tuvieron que luchar unidos para ganar sus tierras.. Tenemos que coger fuerza en nuestros corazones y luchar y sufrir mucho todavía. Tenemos que luchar contra la pobreza, el hambre y la injusticia.[274]

The Exodus story has been a source of inspiration for many marginalized communities through the ages. The fact that in the middle of the Lacandon jungle small groups of indigenous people began to search for practical applications to their marginalized setting based on this narrative speaks of the conditions and also of the intense need for liberation.

In 1974, the local government wanted to commemorate the five hundredth anniversary of the birth of Bishop Bartolome de Las Casas (1474) and requested the help of Bishop Samuel

[274] Womack, *Chiapas*, 57.

Ruiz to organize an event. With his savvy and creative attitude, Ruiz decided to involve actual members of the indigenous communities to help organize this event. The outcome was completely different than what the local authorities had envisioned, and they came to regret having enlisted Ruiz's help.

'El Congreso indigena de 1974' was celebrated with the arrival of delegates of the different Mayan communities in Chiapas. This was the crucial moment in which the indigenous communities felt empowered, and it perhaps marked the beginning of the revolt of 1994. To be inclusive of all, "The proceeding were conducted exclusively in four indigenous languages, young interpreters from multiethnic communities around Las Margaritas and Comitán doing the translations, and the people spoke with unprecedented frankness. Drawn from 327 communities, the delegates included 587 Tzeltales, 350 Toztziles, 152 Tojolabales, and 161 Choles."[275]

During this conference, there were four themes which can be summarized under four social justice topics: land, health, education, and commerce. In regard to the first topic of land or 'Justicia agrarian,' the discussion was around the idea that the land is owned by the one who works it. The conversation concluded with demands to end land appropriation by the government and also to allocate parcels of land to farmers to plant so they could make a living. In regard to the topic of health, the request was for vaccines for all indigenous children and accessible healthcare for all communities. The topic of education led to planning for more schools to educate the indigenous children and also more teachers to make this a reality. Finally in regards to commerce, the conversation centered around the exploitation of indigenous peoples and the profits of foreign corporations/governments on the backs of those who produced corn, beans, coffee, etc. These conversations inspired the community.

[275] MacEoin, *The People's Church*, 34.

Carmen Legorreta Diaz in her book *Religión, política y guerrilla en Las Cañadas de la Selva Lacandona* writes about other attendees at this conference who recognized opportunities to link their political aspirations with the indigenous communities.:

> Los militantes politicos de izquierda, por su parte, también vieron el congreso como un medio para crear "conciencia" ne los indígenas de su condición de explotados y prepararlos para su "liberación definitive"' por ello estaban más preocupados por su formación ideológica y por construer la vanguardia revolucionaria, que por buscar soluciones a las demandas de tierra, educación, salud y comercio, entre otras, de la comunidad.[276] (The political militants of the left, for their part, also saw the Congress as a means for creating "consciousness" among the indigenous people of their condition of being exploited and to prepare them for their "definitive liberation," which is why they were more concerned with their ideological formation and with building the revolutionary vanguard than with seeking solutions to the community's demands for land, education, health and commerce, among others.)

As the years progressed, the different Mayan communities became more organized in demanding better outcomes for the indigenous people. Their dissatisfaction was clear and the local government began to ascribe blame to Samuel Ruiz and his Church. The elite members of society also demanded the restoration of order in which they had all the power, owned the land, and controlled the water in the region, so they began to wonder if they needed to take action to get rid of Ruiz, just as had happened in El Salvador with Archbishop Romero. Rumors began to circulate that Ruiz was organizing a revolutionary movement and that he could arm every indigenous community in the event of a conflict. Mexico as a nation continued to disregard the needs of the indigenous communities and during the 1970s and 1980s everything seemed to be in turmoil. Knowing the extreme conditions of the indigenous people, Samuel Ruiz continued to express his support for them: "We cannot continue to build the future of Mexico on the grave of the indigenous peoples, neglecting to incorporate seriously the oldest root of our national identity

[276] Carmen Legorreta Diaz, *Religión, política y guerrilla en Las Cañadas de la Selva Lacandona* (México: Cal y Arena, 1998), 57.

and failing to give today's descendants of the first people to forge our Motherland the worthy place to which they are entitled."[277]

Different movements began to formulate a plan to defend the indigenous people's right and to stand up against the oppressive form of government. Some would argue that without Ruiz's theological work creating awareness among the indigenous communities about human rights there wouldn't be a Zapatista movement. Agrem agrees: "If it hadn't been for Don Samuel, there wouldn't be a Zapatista army. The Diocese never proposed creating a people's army. But the increasing conscience in these communities made it possible [for] the Zapatista army [to] emerge."[278] John D. Early also claims that the ministry implemented by Bishop Samuel created the basis and conditions for those conversations. At the same time, the pastoral workers Ruiz had trained became instrumental in raising consciousness among the indigenous people. A former EZLN combatant said regarding the easy recruiting process of parishioners to this movement, "People joined because the Bible was interpreted in light of the Apocalypse. It taught that the people of God must fight with arms. This was the result of the reflection each Sunday and in each community under the influence and leadership of the catechists who had become members of the EZLN."[279]

Ruiz himself never advocated for the use of violence even though back in the late 1980s he expressed support for the Sandinista movement, an armed movement in Nicaragua in 1987. At that time, Ruiz had visited the country to learn and show support. His conclusions based on the visit was that the people had no choice but to fight. "We must leave Egypt to arrive at the

[277] MacEoin, *The People's Church*, 14.

[278] David Agren, "In Mexico's Chiapas State, Bishop Ruiz Leaves Large Legacy," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 28, 2016, accessed July 12, 2019, https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/mexicos-chiapas-state-bishop-ruiz-leaves-large-legacy.

[279] Early, *Maya and Catholic Cultures in Crisis*, 285.

Promised Land…But this involves political interventions, it does not come about by prayer alone…Christians can take part without misgiving of conscience in the Sandinista movement, even in the armed struggle so that a new society may arise." [280] A year later, when Ruiz saw how the militant ideology was being promoted throughout his dioceses, he felt that his parishioners would be at risk if they joined the movement. This time he said something completely different but perhaps more consistent with his view on violence as a method of liberation. "El proyecto armado es un Proyecto de muerte contrario a Dios, quien quiere un camino de vida."[281] (The armed project is a project of death, one contrary to God, who desires a path of life.)

The Zapatista uprising on January 1, 1994 brought the ministry of Bishop Ruiz into the spotlight. His unconditional support for improving the conditions of his parishioners had been criticized by elite members of society, but until that moment Ruiz had not been a major threat even when the Vatican had actively tried to force him to resign. With the increasing tensions in the region, Mexican politicians began to argue that the Liberation theology and the Marxist ideologies promoted by Ruiz's Church had contributed to the indoctrination of the indigenous population and the unrest in Chiapas. Since the revolutionary movement surprised the government, the Mexican government attempted to blame Bishop Samuel Ruiz for the disturbance in the region. However, thanks to the international community following the events, after a few days of fighting an attempt to deescalate the conflict forced the government to accept the demands of the EZLN that Don Samuel mediate on behalf of both parties. Not only did the government accede to this request, but both parties agreed that the cathedral of San Cristóbal

[280] Early, *Maya and Catholic Cultures in Crisis,* 286.
[281] Krauze, *Mexico*, 454.

would be the site for these conversations of peace. The religious center of the diocese became the center of the conflict, the place where both parties came for resolution.

Compared to Hidalgo and Morelos, Bishop Samuel Ruiz had a different stand with regard to redemptive violence. For Ruiz, violence was not the ultimate solution, even though he would continue to sympathize with those who joined the movement. As he wrote:

> We understand the subjective situation of many of our brothers that have opted for a path that we consider wrong. The cry of anguish of those who give up their lives in search of better conditions deserves all our understanding, if not for them, at least for their children. As a diocese, we declared that violence obstructs the path of true solutions, and from this rejection of violence, we want to accompany the people and their social organizations to defend their rights and better the true conditions of their lives.[282]

Ruiz was not shy about blaming the government for choosing not to take responsibility for the structures of oppression implemented in Mexican society. He believed that the process of peace was not about the EZLN dropping their weapons but about society as a whole addressing the issues that had led to the uprising. Throughout the early stages of the conflict, Don Samuel continued to support the indigenous communities and the many ministries in the State of Chiapas. He also continued to be the mediator for the EZLN and the Mexican government until 1998 when he resigned, accusing the government of simulating the peace process and refusing to bring any changes to the region. Even after his resignation and after disbanding the different committees, Ruiz continued to be an advocate for the indigenous people's rights until his death at the age of 86 on January 24, 2011.

Most would associate Ruiz's legacy with that of Bartolomé De Las Casas, both being protectors of the indigenous people. Yet the only difference perhaps is that Ruiz validated the indigenous people's rights as human beings and citizens of Mexico. Without taking credit away

[282] Early, *Maya and Catholic Cultures in Crisis*, 292.

from the EZLN for choosing to act independently to better their communities, one cannot see their struggle independent of what Ruiz tried to accomplish through his devoted ministry.

Conclusion

In this chapter I argued that within Christian religion there were voices of protest against the oppressive conditions under which the indigenous population existed, dating back to the conquest of America. What happened five hundred years ago set in motion a new era. While the EZLN has been a movement that has focused on the rights of indigenous people, in this chapter I underlined how over the course of time there have been religious individuals who have voiced similar concerns and who have worked toward improving the conditions of life for this people. I noted that what Antonio Montesino and Toribio of Motolinia did five hundred years ago sparked action from other religious figures like Bartolome de Las Casas. At the same time, I highlighted how religious leaders like Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla and Jose Morales y Pavón set in motion a conversation and actions about the role of faith in politics accompanied by what they considered to be the necessity of redemptive violence. Finally, drawing on all these legacies, I argued that Bishop Samuel Ruiz not only transformed his ministry among the indigenous population in Chiapas but embodied the concepts of Liberation theology and provided the ground for the Zapatista movement to flourish. In this there is a direct link to the uprising in Chiapas since one cannot speak of the EZLN without speaking of Don Samuel. As David Agren said, "If it hadn't been for Don Samuel, there wouldn't be a Zapatista army. The diocese never proposed creating a people's army. But the increasing conscience in these communities made it possible that the Zapatista army emerged."[283]

[283] David Agren, "In Mexico's Chiapas State, Bishop Ruiz Leaves Large Legacy."

Chapter 4

Muslims in Diaspora and the Arrival of Allah in the Land of the Zapatistas

It is Ramadan and over 1.5 billion Muslims around the world are observing the ninth month of the Islamic calendar by fasting, praying, and gathering in community. During this annual ritual, believers commemorate Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) first revelation from Allah. Observance of Ramadan is one of the five Pillars of Islam, or one of the five acts required of faithful believers. The strict fasting from food and drink from sunrise to sunset is required of all adult devotees capable of doing it. Exceptions are made for those breastfeeding, pregnant, sick, elderly, or those traveling. Muslims break their fast at sunset with a special meal called *iftar*.

In a remote location in the southern part of Mexico, a few women have gathered in a humble home to prepare the meal of *iftar* under the supervision of Iman Ibrahim, who at the same time is also gathering his thoughts in order to impart a spiritual message to his *ummah* (community) during the evening prayer. Ibrahim had just returned to his hometown "after three years of training at the Great Mosque of Granada"[284] in Spain. For this small congregation of one hundred people, Ibrahim's anticipated return after two years abroad comes with high expectations of a better future. As they continue to establish themselves in the region, many of the faithful believers hope to grow in number and perhaps be more accepted in the region which perceived them as an odd minority whose religious costumes are foreign to most in the community. Ibrahim's return has almost a messianic symbolism for the community—not that he

[284]Avedis Hadijan, "The Gods of Chiapas: Mexican Muslims in the Shadow of Zapatistas," *International Business Times*, accessed October 3, 2019, https://www.ibtimes.com/gods-chiapas-mexican-muslims-shadow-zapatistas-1407812.

is perceived as the savior of the faithful believers. A lot of pressure has been placed on this single individual, and he knows it. Regarding these high expectations, Ibrahim said in an interview to Mexican magazine *Letras Libres*, "Es una gran responsabilidad, da mucho miedo. La verdad es que si alguien más puediera tomar mi lugar, yo se lo entregaría en un segundo; pero no lo hay, la gente me ha escogio a mí."[285] (It is a great responsibility, it is scary. The truth is that if someone else could take my place, I would give it up in a second; but there is no one. The people have chosen me.)

Ibrahim and his family grew up in a Catholic home like many of their neighbors, but over the years they became disillusioned with the Church and eventually with the entire subject of religion. Ibrahim was introduced to Islam by accident one night after his father told me him to go and check out a gathering where a "new faith" was being discussed. He was unfamiliar with anything that had to do with Islam besides knowing it was a religion from the Middle East. At the prayer meeting, Ibrahim was so moved by the words of the presenter that "that very night he took the oath of Shahada, which is the first pillar of Islam consisting in repeating the following two declarations: "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God."[286] That is all that is needed in order to become a Muslim.

It has been more than two decades since this religious encounter, and now Ibrahim is viewed as the religious leader of this small Muslim community in the middle of what appears to be nowhere. Yet their conversion story is being followed all around the globe.

[285] Paulina Villegas and Marcela Zendejas Lasso de la Vega, "El Regreso de Ibrahim," *Letras Libres*, accessed October 3, 2019, https://www.letraslibres.com/mexico/el-regreso-ibrahim.

[286] Avedis Hadijan, "The Gods of Chiapas: Mexican Muslims in the Shadow of Zapatistas."

The dynamics described in this small gathering could be taking place anywhere in East Asia, North Africa, or the Middle East where there are large populations of Muslims, yet the small group of faithful believers assembled that afternoon in that kitchen are members of the Tzotzil indigenous Mayan population in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas. Who would have thought of celebrating Ramadan in Mexico? While there are only 3,760[287] Muslims in Mexico, a country predominantly associated with Catholicism, in the southern state of Chiapas, there is a growing population of four hundred to six hundred Muslim believers (the numbers vary depending according to the report), all of whom belong to one of the many Mayan ethnic tribes in the area. Yet they have chosen to convert to Islam.

That evening, as the Tzotzil Muslim believers gathered at the mosque for prayer, then broke their fast and shared meal that had been prepared laboriously by the matriarchs of the group, reporter Avedis Hadijan asked Ibrahim if there was a customary meal being served here for Ramadan like in other Muslim countries around the world. He responded with a smile, "Yes, chicken tacos." Tacos is perhaps more of staple food in Mexican society than a meal associated with Muslim culture, yet Ibrahim's answer highlights the fusion of cultures and belief system in this community that has been taking place since the arrival of Islam in Chiapas. Since all

[287] "In 2005, the government released a more detailed statistic on the religious composition of Mexico based on data from the year 2000 census and population studies. This revealed that there were 1,421 Muslims recorded as living in Mexico at this time (INEGI 2005). This figure more than doubled over the ten-year period to 2010, with there now being 3,760 Muslims in the country according to statistics (INEGI 2011b). While these statistics stem from a reliable source, we cannot be entirely certain about how dependable they are, since people may have reasons for wishing to hide their religious identity, they may not participate in these official data-gathering exercises, relations who report such data may not acknowledge their family members' religious conversion, and the population is not static due to the regular inward and outward flow of migrants; these factors all make the official figures questionable." Mark Lindley-Highfield, "Islam in Mexico and Central America," in *Routledge Handbook of Islam in the West*, ed. Roberto Tottoli (London: Routledge, 2015), 157.

members of this Muslim community have some type of Mayan ethnicity, there are many cultural traditions still being practiced, which Islam does not interpose. Yet there are other customs unique to Islam, like the wearing of the hijab for women, which sets them apart from the rest of the population in the town. Some would argue that the architectural structure built in the neighborhood of La Esperanza, where this group congregated that night for prayer, greatly differs from the rural landscapes surrounding their building. But perhaps that is not as unusual as the religious tradition being practiced inside, which to the rest of the town seems so foreign, especially when the *adhan* or call to prayer is done in Arabic in a country that has made Spanish its official language but where many Mayan indigenous languages continue to be spoken.

In the social science fields, some have expressed concerns of ethnocentrism, given that the Islamic religion is such a foreign religious tradition to the region of Chiapas, and therefore one that threatens to change the indigenous culture and the spiritual practices in the region. In a more extreme case, government officials have expressed concerns, among them former president of Mexico, Vicente Fox, who shared his own concerns about the arrival of Islam in the area in light of "a possible connection between the Mayan Muslims in Chiapas to Islamic terrorist organizations."[288] With the growing Islamophobic coverage in the media after September 11, 2001, some news outlets have described the arrival of Muslim missionaries to the region as possible envoys of Al-Qaeda with a mission of anti-globalist jihad.

While it might seem that the arrival of Islam in the region of Chiapas is a new phenomenon and perhaps not relevant to the EZLN uprising, I propose in this chapter that in order to understand the arrival of this religious tradition in San Cristobal de las Casas one does

[288] Harold Morales, "Islam in Chiapas: An Overview and Critical Engagement with the Sources," *Maydan*, accessed October 5, 2019, https://www.themaydan.com/2016/10/islam-in-chiapas-an-overview-and-critical-engagement-with-the-sources/.

well to recall that Islam in fact arrived in the Iberian Peninsula five hundred years earlier. By following this process, we begin to see that this religious tradition is related to the indigenous struggle for which the Zapatistas are fighting.

In the first section, I begin by highlighting the origins of Islam and how by migrating to the Iberian Peninsula Islam became unintentionally connected to the colonial project launched in 1492 with the fall of Granada. In the second section, in order to support the argument that Muslims or Moriscos have been present in the American continent since the establishment of the Spanish colonies five hundred years ago, I review several cases that confirm the arrival of Islam in the 'New World' at the request of the Spanish people, even against the wishes of the Spanish Crown. Finally, I examine how Islam arrived in San Cristobal de Las Casas and what role it plays in the Zapatista movement.

The Rise of the Christian Empire and the Purging of Muslim Spain

The notion of there being a link between Islam and the indigenous struggle in Chiapas is perhaps difficult given that these two movements began in two distinct geographical locations and historical periods, and because of the apparently different intention for which each was conceived. Yet even though Islam originated hundreds of years earlier and in a different geographical location than the Zapatista movement, in time it would relate to the indigenous population's struggle at the fall of Granada in 1492, a date that set in motion the modern era discussed in chapter 1. In this section I establish a contextual background and highlight some events in the history of Islam that align this religious tradition with the collision that would take place on the European continent centuries later once the Christian religion was adopted as part of the identity of the political powers. At the same time, I clarify how the religious intolerance created by all the political changes in the Iberian Peninsula forced the Muslim and Jewish

communities to settle in Europe and North Africa in order to survive. Some members of these communities eventually ended up in the Spanish colonies, despite all the travel restrictions imposed on them by the Spanish Crown.

The Arabian Peninsula is considered the place where the religious community of Islam originates since Muslims commemorate the place where the forty-year-old Muhammad (PBUH)— who was praying inside a cave called *al-Hira*, near the city of Mecca—received the visit of archangel Gabriel which revealed to him what became known as the first verses of the Qur'an. With time, this discourse would be written down to become the sacred scripture for all Muslims. Yet according to the Qur'an, Islam is not considered a new religion since it is "the same religion of Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Moses and Jesus."[289] However one can argue that the formation of the first Islamic community began with the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his immediate followers. During this time, Mecca became a major center for trade where wealthy and powerful people congregated. At the same time, the city became the center of Arabian idolatry and many visitors came from afar to worship the many idols housed in the town. Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes in *The Heart of Islam*, "The Ka'bah, or the House of God, which stands at the center of Mecca and is the most holy is site in Islam, was built originally, according to Muslim belief, by Adam himself and rebuilt by Abraham. But this primordial sanctuary had now become filled with the idols of various tribes who would regularly visit Mecca for the purpose of pilgrimage."[290] Nevertheless, soon after the establishment of this

[289] Nasr Abu-Zayd, "Religions: From Phobia to Understanding," *Human Architecture: Journal of Sociology of Self-knowledge* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 10.

[290] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 30.

community, Mecca would become the focus of religious devotion for faithful believers, since one of the Five Pillars of Islam is the performance of the annual *hajj* or pilgrimage to Mecca.

Though after this significant revelation in 609 A.D. only a few friends accepted the message of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), with time he acquired both more followers and opposition among local settlers. Due to the harassment and persecution, he and his followers were forced to relocate in 622 A.D. to the city of Yathrib, north of Mecca. Once more Nasr explains how "that migration, called *al-hijrah* in Arabic, marks the major turning point in Islamic History when Islam was transformed from a small group of devotees to a fully-fledged community. Yathrib became known as *Madinat al-nabi*, the City of the Prophet, and is known to this day as Medina."[291] In Medina, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) formed the first Islamic community, and with time this became the model for all Islamic societies.

About a decade later in 632, the Prophet (PBUH) died in Medina; having eradicated the conflict among the many tribes in the region, he is credited for unifying the Arabian Peninsula. As Islam continued to grow in the area, the challenges of not having a successor appointed by the Prophet (PBUH) to lead the community increased migration would be inevitable for the existence of this new faith. This is the main reason why Islam began to reach other parts of the globe, including Europe, within such a short period of its founding.

Even though the arrival of Islam on the European continent is crucial for our discussion, it is not relevant until 1492 that it was declared a threat to the religious affiliation of the Spanish Empire. A Eurocentric perspective claims that Muslims conquered Spain and Portugal beginning in 711 A.D. However, since the concepts of nations and states are more modern, it is more accurate to say that the inhabitants living in the different towns of the Iberian Peninsula

[291] Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*, 31.

surrendered easily to the small army of seven thousand troops commanded by the young general Tariq bin Ziyad, preferring the rule of Islamic forces to the harsh conditions imposed by the Visigoths under the previous ruler of Spain. In the next years, Muslims settled predominantly in southern Spain (also known as Al-Andalus), making it their home for centuries. During this period, different Muslim dynasties flourished in the Iberian Peninsula, bringing architectural advances to the region and immense knowledge in the areas of philosophy, religion, science, math, music, and literature. Maria Rosa Menocal writes that "it would be al-Andalus's vast intellectual wealth, inseparable from its prosperity in the material realm, that made it the 'ornament of the world.'"[292] As an example, Menocal contrasts how the caliphal library of Cordoba, which had "four hundred thousand volumes,"[293] compared to "the largest library in Christian Europe [which] probably held no more than four hundred manuscripts."[294]

Nevertheless, the most significant contributions of the Islamic rulers in the region was the religious tolerance to accommodate the different religious traditions of those who had settled in the Iberian Peninsula. Even though it wasn't always peaceful, the coexistence of these traditions during this era was a big contrast from that of previous rulers. Carr explains that "the main beneficiaries of these arrangements in the early period of al-Andalus were Jews, for whom the Muslim conquests brought release from near-pariah status under the Visigoths. Under the Córdoban Caliphate, a number of Jews achieved high positions [in] Muslim courts as counselors, physicians, statesmen, diplomats."[295] The Jewish community had settled in the area as early as

[292] María Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval* Spain (New York: Back Bay Books, 2002), 33.

[293] Menocal, *The Ornament of the World*, 33.

[294] Menocal, *The Ornament of the World*, 33.

[295] Carr, *Blood and Faith*, 17.

the third century[296] but their interaction with Christians was always complicated based on their religious differences. From early on, leaders of the Christian Church created policies to avoid mingling, whether at meals or in marriage. Benjamin R. Gampel explains the main reason for this tension:

> Christian theological attitudes to, and estimation of, Judaism provided the grounds rules by which these two faith-communities could interact in Christian lands. According to Christian theology, Jews were to be kept in a debased status because of their refusal to recognize Jesus as the Son of God, and God's rejection of them as his chosen people. In addition, they were to be kept separate from Christians so that the 'True Israel' would not be influenced by the Jews's religious activities. Christians held out the hope that Jews who had rejected Jesus would in the 'fullness of time' return to him in grace.[297]

Besides the theological differences between Christians and Jews that highlighted the lack of Jewish integration to Christian society by their members, Jews were under constant suspicion of insufficient political loyalty. This was the case even as Islam was arriving on the continent. Gapel notes that "in 694, the Visigoths claims, based on evidence obtained from 'confessions,' that Jews were conspiring with newly organized and triumphant Islam to overthrown them."[298]

The arrival of Muslims on the Iberian Peninsula marked the beginning of a forceful interaction of the three religious civilizations of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, which some label as "La Convivencia.' Matthew Carr reminds us that under Islamic rule,

> the treatment of Christians and Jews in Muslim Iberia was determined by the Koranic dispensation known as the *dhimma*, or Covenant, according to which the 'Peoples of the Book' became protected but subordinate minorities within the Islamic State. Jews and

[296] "Indeed, the first bit of data that points to the existence of Jews in Iberia is also testimony to their integration into Hispano-Roman society. This evidence is a third-century tombstone, now lost, that commemorated the death of a girl, Annia Salomonula, at the age of one year, four months, and one day." Bejamin R. Gampel, "Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Medieval Iberia: Convivencia through the Eyes of Sephardic Jews," *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain*, edited by Vivian B. Mann, Thomas F. Glick and Jerrilynn D. Dodds (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1992), 11.

[297] Gampel, *Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Medieval Iberia,* 13.

[298] Gampel, *Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Medieval Iberia,* 14.

> Christians were allowed to worship and administer their communities according to their own religious laws, but such autonomy was always circumscribed.[299]

Although Jews welcomed the religious tolerance established under Islamic rule, on the other hand Christians despised their second-class status since they had enjoyed many years of political power and dominance in the region. It would be naïve to say that there were no tensions or persecutions among these three religious communities during this period, yet one can also recognize the many instances of peaceful cohabitation in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims could respectively exercise their faith and make a contribution to other fields in society for hundreds of years on the peninsula.

The shifting of political powers on the Iberian Peninsula and the embracing of the Christian faith as the guiding force would bring an unforeseen change in the area. Carr estimates that the "Muslim population of Iberia at the beginning of the twelfth century, including Berbers, Arabs, and indigenous converts to Islam, may have reached as high as 5.5 million"[300] but those numbers declined considerably in the fifteenth century, and most importantly during this period there was a drastic change creating tensions among the different religious communities.

The alteration of the dynamics in the Iberian Peninsula began with the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella. This union of persons led to the union of their dominions in Spain. With the blessing of the Church, the Catholic monarchs attempted to Christianize the Iberian Peninsula by the sword, undoing most of what previous Islamic rulers had done for the coexistence of the different religious traditions. Karoline Cook reminds us that at first there seemed to be tolerance for other faith traditions as certain agreements were made during the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula by Ferdinand and Isabella:

[299] Carr, *Blood and Faith*, 17.
[300] Carr, *Blood and Faith*, 40.

> Initial surrender treaties provided a contractual agreement between the Christians conquerors and Muslim communities that was borrowed from the Islamic principle of the dhimmi, the status conferred on protected religious minorities. Dhimma status enabled Iberian Muslims in Christian cities to maintain their religious institutions and administrative infrastructure, including an Islamic court system. Conquered people became tributaries in exchange for religious and administrative autonomy.[301]

Regrettably, soon enough the Catholic monarchs violated these treaties and the Muslims and Jews began to suffer the effects of religious intolerance which later turned into the racialization of these communities, creating a diaspora.

Religion continued to be the driving force that influenced the categorization of people based on their belief system and if somehow those were not aligned theologically with the Church, they would be persecuted, forced to convert, or killed. Walter Mignolo summarizes the impact of religion during the reconfiguration of political power in this period: "Christians placed themselves at the center—epistemic privilege of theology and the theo-politics of knowledge—both as members of the right religion and the hegemonic theological discourse and as White Spaniards and Portuguese."[302] There arose a new categorization of people based on their religious belief, with those of the Christian faith considered superior to Muslims and Jews. However, the 'discovery' of a new kind of people in the Americas would force the colonial powers to consider other ways of classifying people, besides religion. Gema Martin-Muñoz writes how "the expulsion of the Muslims and Jews from Al-Andalus and the discovery of America fueled a belief that Europe was a closed identity that declared itself as the sole guardian of the attributes of humanity and treated other people as inferior."[303]

[301] Karoline P. Cook, *Forbidden Passages: Muslims and Moriscos in Colonial Spanish America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 12.

[302] Mignolo, "*Islamophobia/Hispanophobia*," 9.

[303] Gema Martin-Muñoz, "Unconscious Islamophobia," *Human Architecture: Journal of The Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 8, no. 2 (2010): 21–28.

In chapter 1, I discussed the perception towards Muslims and Jews. I conclude this section by highlighting that it was the Christians' attitude towards Muslims and Jews that forced their migration to other parts of Europe and North Africa. Though the Spanish Crown prohibited many of them from traveling to the other Spanish territories, nevertheless many Muslims and Jews found ways to settle in the new colonies clandestinely.

II. The Disembarking of Islam in the 'New World'

It is difficult to tell with precision when Islam arrived on the shores of the American continent since there is no documentation available that points to an exact date. Perhaps it is because Muslims arriving on the new continent wished to remain incognito, subverting the restrictions imposed by the Spanish authorities that prohibited Muslims or Moriscos from traveling to any of the Spanish colonies. Camila Pastor de Maria y Campos like many others supports the argument that "Islam as a religious tradition arrived in the Americas hand in hand with Christianity, in the shadow of the Spanish Reconquista that was extended in the conquest of the New Spain."[304] By contrast, Mark Lindley-Highfield writes that the "earliest record of presumed Muslim presence in Central America dates back to the arrival of Africans from the Mandinka, or Malinke, tribe in Panama in 1522."[305] Perhaps the slipperiness of the date is indicative of when this religious tradition was officially recognized as being present in the Spanish colonies. Still, as previously stated by Pastor de Maria y Campos, there is vast evidence that Islam came to America in a clandestine manner at the same time as Spanish sailors began exploring the 'New World' in 1492.

[304] Camila Pastor de Maria y Campos, "Guest of Islam: Conversion and the Institutionalization of Islam in Mexico," *Crescent Over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, The Caribbean and Latino USA*, eds. Maria Del Mar and Logroño Narbona (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 144.

[305] Lindley-Highfield, "Islam in Mexico and Central America," 154.

In order to develop the argument that the origin of Islam in the Americas was not in San Cristobal De Las Casas, Chiapas, after the EZLN uprising with the coming of the Movimiento Mundial Murabitum, in this section I present several different cases that suggest how this religious tradition could have been here for more than five hundred years and how it arrived in the New World in a clandestine manner as Muslims, Moriscos, and African slaves were brought there by Europeans. Islam came to America as a result of the colonial project and with the direct involvement of Spanish colonizers despite all the restrictions placed by the Spanish Crown to prohibit Muslims from making the transatlantic journey.

Even when the Spanish Crown had attempted to eliminate Islam from their territories by expelling faithful believers, forcing them to convert and erasing any of their contributions to society, there was an interdependence by the Spanish people that forced them to reevaluate their restrictions on Muslim and Moriscos in order to contribute to the colonial project, as I explain next.

The first group of Muslims or Moriscos that colonial sources mentioned as coming to the New World five hundred years ago were primarily those who were free and had an assigned task to do. Even though many Muslims had been forced into exile to other parts of Europe and North Africa, some found a temporary home in America even after the Spanish Crown had issued laws prohibiting Muslims and Moriscos from traveling to the Spanish colonies. It was believed that as long as Moriscos made a contribution to the colonial project being built in America and their assignment was only temporary, they would be able to make the transatlantic journey in Spanish ships with the understanding that their Islamic beliefs were not to be shared with the natives. Karoline P. Cook writes regarding some vocations that were exempted: “Moriscos could enlist as

soldiers and sailors, who were not subject to the same scrutiny as emigrants because it was assumed they would return to Spain."[306]

The problematic part with these exclusions was that if Morisco soldiers or sailors, for example, wanted to stay and settle in the New World, they could find a way to do so without being stopped since it was difficult for Spanish authorities to monitor their whereabouts; they could easily stay in a port or abandon their military troops during a mission. "Spanish authorities complained repeatedly of the difficulties in locating 'prohibited persons' who had arrived with false licenses, due to the vast distances separating the viceregal centers from the towns and settlements on the edges of empire where they feared Moriscos and *conversos* would settle."[307] Perhaps this explains why it has been difficult to pinpoint the arrival of Islam in the Americas since many of those Muslims wanted to remain anonymous, otherwise they would be forced to return to Europe. Yet we can see how easy it would be for Muslims and Moriscos to settle throughout the continent.

Another profession that enabled Muslims or Moriscos to come to the Americas was that of interpreter. Cook again states that "a number of Europeans, including Magellan and Columbus, recruited or captured Arabic speakers to act as interpreters in the lands they traded in or conquered, due to their perceived linguistic skills."[308] It was a practice of Portuguese sailors later adopted by the Spanish conquistadors to leave linguists behind in hopes that during their stay they would learn the local languages and facilitate subsequent trade. If this was the case, then Muslim or Moriscos interpreters were used earlier in the exploration of the American

[306] Karoline P. Cook, "De Los Prohibidos: Muslims and Moriscos in Colonial Spanish America," *Crescent Over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, The Caribbean and Latino USA*, eds. Maria Del Mar and Logroño Narbona (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 31.

[307] Cook, "De Los Prohibidos," 31–32.

[308] Cook, *Forbidden Passages*, 38.

continent. Cook mentions that in the 1530s, "Spaniards brought interpreters to northern New Spain and there were some who were Moriscos or North African Muslims conversant in Arabic dialects. Their perceived facility with languages made these individuals attractive candidates for becoming *naguatatos,* or translators of Nahuatl, the language spoken in much of central Mexico."[309]

A further exception to the prohibition of Moriscos making the transatlantic trip was those with special skills and abilities that could contribute to the building of Spanish colonies. Spaniards often wanted to replicate in the colonies certain aspects of their European lifestyle and brought with them those with the requisite skills. For example, Cook mentions that the silk industry in Granada was well known around the world, and that some of the new settlers believed that they could build a silk business in the colonies if they only trained the indigenous population, and for that reason they turned to those experts—who happened to be Moriscos.

> In 1537 Friar Juan de Zumárraga, bishop of New Spain, requested that a group of Moriscos be brought to New Spain to teach indigenous peoples the delicate art of raising silkworms on a diet of mulberry leaves from trees imported from Granada and harvesting and spinning silk from their cocoons…While the Crown rejected Zumarraga's proposal, others were more successful in bringing Moriscos and Muslims to work as interpreters or laborers on the construction of forts in the Caribbean.[310]

Regrettably the free-range pass given to skilled Moriscos to travel to the Spanish colonies was taken away and more enforcement was put into place to avoid disseminating Islam among the indigenous communities. I return to this towards the end of this section.

One more type of Muslims or Moriscos allowed to settle in the New World were slaves living in the Iberian Peninsula. Once again, colonial documents indicate the permits Spanish masters held to take Morisco slaves to New Spain. Cook writes regarding these permits that, "the

[309] Cook, *Forbidden Passages,* 40.
[310] Cook, "De Los Prohibidos," 28.

royal licenses granted for them to emigrate placed strict limits on their presence in Spanish America. However, a number of these Morisco men and women remained in Spanish America, either because their masters looked the other way, or because they were able to run away and forge new lives for themselves, in communities where they would presumably, although not always, go unrecognized."[311] Many of these Morisco slaves were women who were able to gain their freedom by marrying Spanish men who had settled in the Spanish colonies.

The most important concession made by the Spanish Crown in facilitating the arrival of Islam to the New World was when Africans, forced into slavery, were brought to be exploited in the Spanish colonies. At this point, Africans were already classified as people without souls, just as Columbus categorized the 'Indians' in 1492. Africans were brought over to replace the indigenous population that had been annihilated by the violence of the conquest and the grotesque work load Europeans put on them. Again, not every African forced to take the transatlantic journey survived the harsh conditions. Indeed, "Millions of Africans died in the process of being captured, transported and enslaved in the Americas. This was a genocide at a massive scale."[312] Not only a genocide but also an epistemicide. Yet even when Africans had been stripped of their possessions, freedom, and humanity, most of them secretly carried with them to the New World their own cultural beliefs and forms of spiritualties, including the Islamic tradition that had been familiar on the African continent for centuries.

Though Muslims and Jews were forced into exile in Northern Africa as a result of the Purity Blood laws in the Iberian Peninsula, this was not the first encounter of Islam on the continent. Indeed, Islam in Africa dates back to 640 A.D. exemplifying how this religious

[311] Cook, *Forbidden Passages,* 47.
[312] Grosfoguel, "Epistemic Racism/Sexism," 84.

tradition had become part of the many forms of spiritualties adopted by African natives. Omari H. Kokole clarifies that the arrival of Islam on the African continent came in a method he calls 'Islamisation,' "the process by which the people of North Africa were converted to the Islamic religion and Muslim Faith,"[313] which happened in four phases lasting several centuries. Kokole explains that first phase happened only decades after the first Islamic community was formed in the middle of the seventh century to the eleventh century A.D. and was the initial "Arab Muslim thrust across the North of Africa from Egypt to Morocco-from the east westwards."[314]

The second phase happened as a result of trade in Eastern Africa, at the same time Islam was spreading in the Northern part of the continent in a more combative form. The third phase took place in "the north southwards across the Sahara, largely through peaceful means of migration and trade from around the middle of the eleventh century A.D. onwards."[315]

The final phase of 'Islamisation' according to Kokolo took place at the end of the seventeenth century in the sub-Saharan region. During this period this phase of 'Islamisation' of Africa, it was when the slaving business in the continent began, in part due to how Portuguese and Spanish sailors chose to copy the "Italian model of plantation slavery"[316] and applied it their colonies.

Even though Islam was clearly present on the African continent, Ramón Grosfoguel reminds us of the link of Muslims to Africans in his article titled *The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized University.* He writes, "Africans were perceived at the time as Muslims and the

[313] Omari H. Kokole, "The Islamic Factor in African-Arab Relations," *Third World Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (July 1984): 687, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3992070.

[314] Kokole, "The Islamic Factor in African-Arab Relations," 702.

[315] Kokole, "The Islamic Factor in African-Arab Relations," 702.

[316] Kwasi Konadu, *Transatlantic Africa 1440–1888* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), xxiii.

racialization of Muslims in 16th century Spain was extended to them. The decision to bring captives from Africa to enslave them in the Americas was directly related to the conclusion of the 1552 Valladolid trial. Here begins the massive kidnapping and captive trade of Africans that is going to be enforced for the next 300 years."[317] John Tofik Karam explains that the Portuguese began and the Spanish continued the process of kidnapping Africans. "Africans began to be acquired by Portuguese and Spanish traders from the regions of Senegambia, around the Senegal and Gambia Rivers, as well as Upper Guinea, which continues southwards to what is today northwest Liberia. For the next 150 years, they were abducted from these regions where Islam was 'the religion of merchants and rulers.'"[318] Sylviane Diouf claims that most likely during the slave trade starting in the sixteenth century there were "estimates that out of around 15 million Africans taken to the Americas, about 2.25–3 million were Muslims."[319] Those statistics mentioned by Diouf highlight just how many individuals forced to settle in the Americas likely identified either publicly or more often privately with the Islamic faith.

With time, the arrival of undetermined numbers of Muslims and Moriscos in the colonies required stricter enforcement since the previous laws written prohibiting the presence of this particular population in the Spanish new territory had been bypassed by the colonizers who had used this people for profit. Camila Pastor de Maria y Campos writes that by "1543 … a royal decree bann[ing] the 'passing of Moorish converts' to the American territories"[320] made it difficult but not impossible for these individuals to travel due to the more rigorous monitoring by

[317] Grosfoguel, "Epistemic Racism/Sexism," 84.

[318] John Tofik Karam, "African Rebellion and Refuge on the Edge of Empire," *Crescent Over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, The Caribbean and Latino USA*, eds. Maria Del Mar and Logroño Narbona (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 47.

[319] Pastor de Maria y Campos, "Guest of Islam," 155.

[320] Pastor de Maria y Campos, "Guest of Islam," 144.

the Spanish authorities. In order to counteract decades of loose application to the original 'Muslim travel ban' in the modern era, there was a reversion to procedures used in the Iberian Peninsula to dominate particular groups like Muslims and Jews, a practice that was later implemented in the New World.

The Inquisition not only destroyed a particular population in the Spanish colonies; it also ensured that Muslims did not indoctrinate the indigenous population. Eventually the Inquisition in the Americas became a means to monitor conversos and moriscos who had come to the continent without authorization. Cook describes how "in 1570 the king ordered the royal courts to aid inquisitors in their effort to uphold Catholicism in the 'provinces that God has entrusted to (the Spanish Crown)." This decree stated: "It is very necessary to take special care and vigilance in the preservation of the devotion, and the good name, reputation, and fame of its settlers…as faithful and Catholic Christians, and natural and true Spaniards."[321] While there is plenty of documentation of persecution and killings based on accusations of having deviant religious beliefs inspired by Islam, Judaism, or other "idolatrous" practices, we will not ever know for sure how effective it would be in removing the Islamic faith from the continent.

Islam in Chiapas: Engaging the Zapatista Movement

The EZLN's forceful entrance onto the world stage exposed the oppressive conditions experienced by indigenous people today in Mexico. The First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle describes how these communities in Chiapas had for many years been denied the most basic aspects of life, which included "work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace."[322] I explained the reason for the

[321] Cook, "De Los Prohibidos," 30.
[322] Marcos, *Shadows of Tender Fury*, 54.

subjugation of this particular population; sadly, this is also the reality of other communities in other parts of the global south with a history of colonization. With the EZLN's uprising, these other marginalized communities began to pay close attention to the situation in Mexico. Early in the 1990s, researchers, humanitarians, artists, writers, and activists began to pour into San Cristobal de las Casas in hopes of getting a better understanding of the conflict. Many others arrived with the sole purpose of standing in solidarity with the indigenous population of this region. This was the case of a particular group of people called the Movimiento Mundial Murabitum, whose role in the EZLN's revolt I explain by clarifying how Islam arrived in San Cristobal de las Casas.

A year into the uprising, a group of Spanish Sufi Muslim converts from Andalucia heard of the EZLN's search for justice and decided to travel more than five thousand miles from Spain to Mexico by plane. They too were hoping to learn more about the movement and for that reason made plans to stay in San Cristobal de las Casas. Sandra Cañas Cuevas writes in *The Politics of Conversion to Islam in Southern Mexico* regarding what inspired these individuals to make the transatlantic journey: "The Spanish Muslim converts believed that the Zapatista agenda shared important similarities with their own politico-religious agenda, namely, liberation from market and state oppression."[323] Unfortunately for these new Muslim allies, the only way for the EZLN to find ultimate liberation would be to embrace their religious tradition. In a region where conversion is customary, these Muslim missionaries hoped to meet with Zapatista leaders to begin a new partnership, but most importantly to convince them to embrace Islam.

[323] Sandra Cañas Cuevas, "The Politics of Conversion to Islam in Southern Mexico," in *Islam and the Americas,* ed. Aisha Khan (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), 164.

Recall that Islam is a rich and diverse tradition and that there are many spectrums of this faith worth distinguishing, among them Sunnism, Shi'ism, and the Sufism, each with their own branches of interpretation. To these various perspectives Nasr would add other perspectives of Islam like the 'traditionalist, the fundamentalist and the modernist,'[324] yet the main element uniting all these Islamic traditions and their branches is the Quran and certain themes like the search for justice.

Camila Pastor de Marias Y Campos recounts how Emir Naifa, one of the leaders of this community, described himself as a Marxist before converting to Islam and now was trying to spread the message of Islam to others. "A missionary of the Movimiento Mundial Murabitum, he is said to have attempted communication with Marcos—the speaker for the Zapatista movement—in the hopes of convincing him of carrying on the Zapatista struggle in the name of Islam."[325] The Murabitum organization is identified more with the Sufi Muslim tradition.

On February 6, 1995 leaders of the Movimiento Mundial Murabitum met with Moises, the mayor of the town in San Cristobal de Las Casas, and after a long conversation they decided to write a letter to subcomandante Marcos confident about establishing a formal partnership between both movements. As far as we know, this letter remains the only documentation of the Movimiento Mundial Murabitum's desire to join with the EZLN. The letter began by highlighting the MMM's respect for the EZLN's fight against the injustices against the indigenous communities as a result of oppressive laws in the country. At the same time, the Movimiento Mundial Murabitum expressed their admiration for wanting to create a better society.

[324] Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*, 57.
[325] Pastor de Maria y Campos, "Guest of Islam," 145.

> Nos dirigimos a vosotros con todo el aprecio y el respeto que lustra heroica y ejemplar lucha nos inspira. Queremos, ante todo saludar vuestra lucha y manifestaros nuestro agradecimiento por el ejemplo de nobleza y dignidad que estáis ofreciendo al mundo entero. Cada grito de liberated de cada uno de los pueblos oprimidos del mundo es un alieno de coraje y esperanza para todos. Hemos seguido vuestra lucha con enorme interés y admiración desde principio.[326] (We are here with all the appreciation and respect, inspired by your heroic and exemplary struggle. More than anything, we would like to acknowledge your struggle and show you our gratitude for the example of loftiness and dignity that you are offering to the whole world. Each cry for liberty from all oppressed people is a breath of courage and hope for all. From the beginning, we have followed your struggle with a great deal of interest and admiration.)

Simultaneously this letter included different points of reference, which clarified the Movimiento Mundial Murabitum's stand in the global struggle against imperialism. Leaders extended an invitation not only to join their local struggle but shared an invitation for the EZLN to form part of a global community fighting for the same ideals against institutions and structures of oppression.

> Nosotros, el Movimiento Mundial Murabitun, os invitamos a sentaros con representantes de los grandes pueblos de Chechenia, Cachemire, Euzkalherria, y otros pueblos que hoy están a la vanguardia de la lucha contra el tiránico orden bancario mundial, y con los que nosotros tenemos relación de colaboración, difusión, orientación y apoyo en sus diferentes luchas. Ellos nos han pedido que os trasmitamos su invitación a compartir ahora el esfuerzo de la lucha para poder disfrutar juntos el orgullo de la victoria final.[327] (We, the Murabitun World Movement, invite you to sit down with representatives of the great people from Chechnya, Kashmir, Basque Country, and other people who are at the forefront of the fight against the tyrannical global banking order, and with whom we collaborate, share, guide and support in their various struggles. They have asked us to communicate their invitation to now join the struggle to share together the pride in the final victory.)

While there are thirteen points addressing different areas of concern in the letter consisting of multiple pages, the group concluded by sharing recommendations to the Zapatista movement for example that working to improve their conditions with the help of the government of Mexico is

[326] Gaspar Morquecho, "A 6,570 días del levantamiento armado del EZLN (XXXVII)," alainet.org, accessed November 3, 2019, https://www.alainet.org/es/active/57580.

[327]Morquecho, "A 6,570 días del levantamiento armado del EZLN (XXXVII)."

futile and a waste of time. Instead the Movimiento Mundial Murabitum proposed that the EZLN join them in their struggle to find other solutions with the help of *ummah*, the Islamic global community. "Demandar al gobierno mexicano que soluciones nuestras necesidades es como pedir al portero del cine que cambie de programa. Él no puede hacerlo, no es su función. No tiene poder para ello."[328] (To ask the Mexican government to solve our needs is like asking the doorman of the movie theater to change the program. He can't do it, that's not his task. He does not have power to do it.) For that reason, the Movimiento Mundial Murabitum recommended that they join forces only under the flag of Islam. "La situación no puede ser resuelta bajo la bandera del cristianismo…ni bajo la bandera del marxismo…la lucha por la liberación de los pueblos debe hacerse bajo la bandera del Islam, siguiendo el mensaje revelado que nos trajo Mohammed, el último de los profetas, el libertador de la humanidad."[329] (The situation cannot be resolved under the banner of Christianity…neither the banner of Marxism…the fight for the liberation of our people needs to be to under the banner of Islam, following the revealed message brought to us by Mohammed, the last prophet, the liberator of humanity). The final passionate words of the document are "Victoria o Muerte!" (Victory or death!). Signed, "Movimiento Mundial Murabitun. Comunidad Mexicana."[330]

Unfortunately, we have no documentation of this letter inviting the EZLN to join the Movimiento Mundial Murabitum being received; there is no response from Subcomandate Marcos or any mention of it by the other EZLN leaders. Perhaps this confirms the EZLN's consistent approach at remaining removed from any religious association. In one instance when asked why the EZLN didn't speak on the subject of religion, Subcomandante Marcos replied:

[328] Morquecho, "A 6,570 días del levantamiento armado del EZLN (XXXVII)."
[329] Morquecho, "A 6,570 días del levantamiento armado del EZLN (XXXVII)."
[330] Morquecho, "A 6,570 días del levantamiento armado del EZLN (XXXVII)."

"The reason Zapatistas refrained from any mention of religion was the fear that the Maya community would see the Zapatistas as just another religious group trying to missionize them. If they did, the war of liberation would become a religious war over religious belief systems."[331] Even after what appears to be the refusal of the EZLN leadership to embrace Islam, Morales reported that the Spanish Sufi Muslims "stayed and established a school, pizzeria, and several other businesses that attracted several families to the emerging community"[332] in the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

Earlier I explained the significance of this town in the state of Chiapas, not only in light of the ministry of the late Bishop Samuel Ruiz and the large Catholic indigenous population, but also in light of what it means to the Zapatista movement, which unapologetically embraces its Mayan heritage. Why is Islam so well received in the land of the Zapatistas? The answer might simply be that they were dissatisfied with their previous religious traditions, which were forced on the indigenous communities. Sandra Cañas Cueva explains, "The majority of Mayas who converted to Islam did so more than fifteen years ago, in 1995, this being their second or third religious conversion experience. Before converting to Islam, they had belonged to the Presbyterian and Seventh-day Adventist Churches respectively."[333] Even though many are suspected to be sympathizers, it is unclear how many of these new converts formed part of the Zapatista movement, since there is no data that documents such allegiance. There is more information available on how Islam has affected the indigenous tradition of those who embraced this new religious tradition.

[331] Early, *Maya and Catholic Cultures in Crisis*, 311.

[332] Harold Morales, "Islam in Chiapas: An Overview and Critical Engagement with the Sources," *Maydan*, accessed October 14, 2019, https://www.themaydan.com/2016/10/islam-in-chiapas-an-overview-and-critical-engagement-with-the-sources/.

[333] Cuevas, *The Politics of Conversion to Islam in Southern Mexico*, 164.

The only case known of an actual EZLN member converting to Islam, based on the articles used in this section, is that of Iman Ibrahim. Ibrahim and his family had been disillusioned with religion like many others in the region. One of Ibrahim's uncles introduced him to the Zapatistas when he was only fourteen years old. To him, the movement was different since it was not affiliated with any religious tradition. The EZLN's focus was to bring change to the marginalized communities of the region; belief systems were not its central concern. Hadijan writes regarding Ibrahim's conversion: "He was a loyal Zapatista in the jungle, until one night in 1996 in San Cristóbal when his father told him to go see what all the fuss was over this new faith: "Son, you like trouble; go see what these people want." So, he attended his first Muslim prayer meeting, led by Nafia at the complex of the Movement for the Da'wa – the name of the Murabitun organization in Chiapas."[334] Ibrahim has been a Muslim ever since and is now the leader of this small community.

The small group of Sufi Muslims missionaries who arrived at San Cristobal de Las Casas in 1994 came with the intention of presenting to locals a religious tradition that not only identifies with the oppressed but acts against structures of oppression. Indigenous people in the region are familiar with this objective since for centuries their ancestors have used their own religious traditions to resist their oppressor. Sandra Cañas Cuevas highlights that "throughout the centuries Mayas have organized to resist dominion. In this process religion becomes an important source of support—a means to resist and contest oppression and marginalization."[335] Did Islam provide another source of support to the Zapatista movement's uprising? Based on the

[334] Avedis Hadijan, "The Gods of Chiapas: Mexican Muslims in the Shadow of Zapatistas," *International Business Times*, accessed October 22, 2019, https://www.ibtimes.com/gods-chiapas-mexican-muslims-shadow-zapatistas-1407812.

[335] Cuevas, *The Politics of Conversion to Islam in Southern Mexico*, 164.

message of the Qur'an and different Muslim scholars, we suspect there is room for a more study on this topic. Hamid Dabashi in his book *Islamic Liberation Theology* reminds us that "Islam itself was born as a religion of protest, a militant defiance of self-paralyzed patrimonialism operative in the Arabian Peninsula, a moral mandate against the fragmented Arab tribalism."[336] Today we continue to see Islam inspiring resistance against global colonial structures and speaking on behalf of the oppressed. This makes me wonder what might have happened in the Lacandon Jungle if the EZLN had listened to the message that the Movimiento Mundial Murabitum was trying to convey.

Conclusion

Even though Islam's origin takes back to the Arabian Peninsula, the migration to Europe in 711 A.D. prepared for a new era of interaction with other religious communities, specifically with Christianity and Judaism, an era known as the 'La Consistencia' (the coexistence). In this chapter I attempted to present how the emergence of a new political power in the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the fifteenth century, which adopted the Christian faith as its official religious tradition, created a new set of conflicts for Muslims and Jews. The religious intolerance at the hands of the Spanish monarchy forced Muslims and Jews either to convert, leave their homeland, or be killed. It was not much of a choice. Many left their homelands and migrated to other parts of Europe, North Africa, or even the Americas. In spite of the prohibitions against travel to the Spanish colonies, there are plenty of cases of Muslims or Moriscos finding a home in the New World as early as 1492. Those not of the Christian faith were typically prevented

[336] Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (London: Routledge, 2008), 70.

from traveling, though exceptions included linguists and those with specialized skills useful to establishing the colonies.

Ruthless practices like the Purity of Blood Laws and the Inquisition in the Iberian Peninsula were subsequently applied in the Americas in order compensate for the lack of enforcement of laws prohibiting Muslims and Moriscos to make the transatlantic journey. The attempt by the Spanish authorities to eliminate Islam from the Spanish colonies in order to avoid spreading this religious tradition among the indigenous population failed. Thus, we can determine that the emergence of Islam in Chiapas at the end of the twentieth century was not a new phenomenon, one brought by the Muslim missionaries of the Movimiento Mundial Murabitum. Available published material does not seem to show that the EZLN ever adopted Islam. Nevertheless, there seems to be a growing community of indigenous people converting to Islam, perhaps a sign of how this religious tradition speaks to their current oppressive conditions.

Chapter 5

The Rage of Hope:

Exploring the Role of Native Mesoamerican Spirituality in the Zapatista Revolution

The 2000 elections in Mexico brought optimism to the indigenous population, which for the first time in decades hoped to be heard and counted as part of the nation. More specifically, the results of these elections brought new hope to the EZLN. Following years of fighting against the federal government, it wanted to see in Chiapas more concrete resolutions pertaining to representation of its communities. So, it was that after more than seventy years in power, the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) was defeated by the *Alianza por el Cambio* (Alliance for Change), a political coalition between the PAN (National Action Party) and *Partido Verde Ecologista de México* (PEV, or Green Ecological Party of Mexico). With more than 43 percent of the popular vote, Vicente Fox was elected to a six-year term. This was the first time the opposition had won an election since the Mexican revolution in 1910. During the presidential campaign, Fox had claimed that he had the ability to work with the conflicted parties and boasted that he would resolve the issue of Chiapas "in fifteen minutes."[337] Even though Fox's projected timeline would become a laughingstock, it is nonetheless important to note that an attempt was made to enter into dialogue with the EZLN.

[337] "El presidente electo de México, Vicente Fox, retomará las negociaciones para solucionar la rebelión indígena de 1994. Obligado por las subastas de campaña, y su propio convenciemiento, el presidente electo de México, Vicente Fox, prometió resolver el conflicto de Chiapas "en 15 minutes" si el subcomandante Marcos se aviene al calendario. El ganador de las históricas elecciones del 2 de julio ha reiterado su interés por un encuentro con el jefe rebelde, pero será necesario más de un cuarto de hora para solucionar el levantamiento indígena de 1994. 'Estoy buscando una cita con él, reemprender el proceso de diálogo y la negociación, declare Fox." Juan Jesús Aznarez, "Quince minutos para pacificar Chiapas," *El País*, accessed December 21, 2019, https://elpais.com/diario/2000/07/15/internacional/963612013_850215.html.

Soon after Fox took office in 2001, a cohort of 24 EZLN representatives commenced a two-week trek to Mexico City in an attempt to begin talks with the new government. At times on foot and at others in the vehicles of generous supporters, the delegates arrived in the capital on March 11, 2001 thanks to the support of Mexican citizens who had followed their journey beginning in the Lacandon jungle of Chiapas. Among the group was the iconic subcomandante Marcos, who on their arrival in the capital's central square called on the Mexican people to join the Zapatista's struggle. One hundred thousand people gathered to hear the demands of the Zapatista delegation. Of the many different speeches made at this historic event, the most memorable was that by Commander Esther, who called for congress to sign into law the San Andrés Indigenous Rights Bill, [338] which had languished since being drafted under the presidency of Ernesto Zedillo back in 1996 by the Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee, a subcommittee assigned by the EZLN which intended to work with Zedillo's government to protect the rights of the indigenous population. Among the issues discussed in this document were: "Recognition of the Indian peoples in the Constitution, broader political representation and participation, a guarantee of full access to justice, promotion of the cultural manifestation of Indian peoples, promotion of their education and mining and increased production and employment opportunities, [and] political representation."[339] In short, the San Andres Indigenous Rights Bill was an attempt to protect the indigenous population and their way of life.

[338] For the full text of this document, see: Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee, "The Dialogue of San Andres and the Rights of Indigenous Culture," *Schools for Chiapas*, accessed July 2019, http://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Indigenous-rights-and-San-Andres.pdf.

[339] Navarro Luis Hernandez, "The San Andrés Accords: Indians and the Soul," *Cultural Survival*, accessed December 1, 2019, https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/san-andres-accords-indians-and-soul.

Comandante Esther's speech was the most remarkable of all the speeches given that day. She not only presented the demands of the EZLN to seek legal protection of the indigenous population, but spoke on behalf of the voiceless indigenous women who continued to be subjugated under the patriarchal colonial/modern society throughout Mexico.

> This is why we want the law on Indigenous Rights and Culture to be approved. It is of the greatest importance for us, the indigenous women of Mexico. It will enable us to be recognized and respected as the women and indigenous people that we are. By this we mean that we want our ways of dressing, speaking, governing, organizing, praying, and healing to be recognized, together with our manner of working in collectives, of respecting the earth and understanding of life, which is the nature we are all part of. This law takes into account our right as women and means that no one can prevent us from participating or deny the dignity and integrity of our work, in equality with men.[340]

Comandante Esther's demand to decolonize their community and for the government to enforce protection of the indigenous people's life would echo in the ears of every Mexican gathered on that day. Even though the previous government had refused to honor the demands, this time around the EZLN delegation seemed to be putting pressure on the new president to work with Congress on their behalf, while the eyes of the country and the world watched.

Once the public gatherings ended, Marcos and the other delegates returned to Chiapas to await the final decision of the new government. As many skeptics had, the legislative branch of government ignored the EZLN's demands; it passed a different version of the bill, ignoring most of the request that had been made. To the "inheritors of this nation," these actions by the new government felt like a backstabbing. The slogan that President Fox had borrowed from the EZLN for his campaign, 'Nunca mas un Mexico sin nosotros' (Never again a Mexico without us) had been hoax. While many observers believed this was a step backwards in the negotiations and most importantly for the country's indigenous people's rights, for the EZLN it became a turning

[340] Mariana Mora, *Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 36.

point in its talks with the government. From this point forward, the EZLN would refuse to work with political institutions and instead would concentrate on forging a new future for its own communities as the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle would explain:

> The politicians who are from the PRI, the PAN, and the PRD came to an agreement among themselves and simply did not recognize indigenous rights and culture. That was in April of 2001 and there the politicians clearly demonstrated that they do not have any decency…[W]e saw clearly that the dialogue and negotiation with the evil governments of Mexico was for naught. In other words, there is no point in us talking with the politicians because neither their heart nor their word is straight, but instead they are twisted and tell lies…We saw that they did not care about blood, death, suffering, the mobilizations, the consultations, the efforts, the national and international statements, the gatherings, the agreements, the signatures, the commitments.[341]

The legislative betrayal forced the ELZN to reorganize. With time, there was a launching of a new approach called the 'Other Campaign,' that sought to create a system to address the needs of the marginalized members of society without the help of the government. Once again, the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle delineates how the EZLN planned to operate:

> We are going to listen to and talk directly, without intermediaries or mediations, with the simple and humble people of Mexico and, according to what we listen (to) and learn, we are going to build, together with those people who are like us, humble and simple, a national platform of struggle, but a platform that is clearly left-wing, i.e. anticapitalist, i.e. antineoliberal, i.e. in favor of justice, democracy, and freedom for the Mexican people.[342]

In the next years, Subcomandante Marcos and other representatives of the EZLN embarked on a tour of the country, talking to everyday people, and hearing their concerns and challenges in order to develop a new strategy. Over the course of the years that followed, there were fewer and fewer public events as they worked closely with the most marginalized members of society and saw that the increasing challenges made it difficult for such marginalized members of society to

[341] General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, "Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle," Sixth Declaration, June 2005, http://sixthdeclaration.blogspot.com.

[342] General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, "Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle."

exist. When Subcomandante Marcos and the other leaders finished touring, Marcos summarized in his writings what they had heard firsthand:

> Down here we are being left with nothing. Except rage. And dignity…Rage and dignity are our bridges, our languages. Let us listen to each other then, let us know each other. Let our rage grow and become hope…If this world doesn't have a place for us, then another world must be made. With no other tool than our rage, no other material than our dignity.[343]

The 'Other Campaign' not only redesigned the agenda but called for the Zapatistas to rethink their approach to solving the needs of their communities. There would be no negotiations with the government and fewer public events from that point on. Those who have studied this movement have called this new period a Neozapatista movement. Yet there was nothing new about the movement that had been inspired by the fighting spirit of their ancestors. What could have inspired their ancestors to resist for more than five hundred years?

In this chapter I argue that while the approach of the EZLN would be different in the next few years, the essence of the movement was the same since their identity was influenced by traditions carried from generations before them. In fact, I claim that it was native Mesoamerican spirituality that played a key role in helping the indigenous communities to resist the different forms of oppression that the colonial powers imposed on them. In the first part of this chapter I present a brief background on one of the sources of inspirtation for many of the members of the EZLN, the *Popol Vuh*. In the second part, I present three different historical events within the last five hundred years in which the indigenous revolted against their oppressors inspired by their various spiritual resources.

Part I: Defending the Sacred: The Role of the Popol Voh in the Zapatista Uprising

[343] Nick Heck, "Introduction," *The Zapatista's Dignified Rage: Final Public Speeches of Subcommander Marcos* (Chico: AK Press, 2018), 20.

Despite the fact that the EZLN has chosen not to promote any religious tradition or be affiliated with a faith-based institution for "fear that the Maya would see the Zapatistas as just another religious group trying to missionize them"[344] (as subcomandante Marcos would warn in the early stages of the uprising), there is no denying that members have their own sources of spirituality that inspire and give meaning to their daily lives but also to the movement. Because the majority of the EZLN soldiers belong to one of the many Maya ethnic groups, the reading of the Popol Vuh, the Maya sacred text which means the 'book of the community,' has never been discouraged by EZLN leaders. While no one has elaborated on why this is so central to them, as it seems consistent with the efforts of the EZLN to help preserve the indigenous culture, in this section I suggest that one of the reason why this is common practice among the EZLN members is because of the spiritual message contained in the *Popol Vuh*, which has inspired many indigenous people not only to join the EZLN but to work towards saving their way of life. Before I develop my argument in more detail, I begin by briefly sharing what this text is and how it came to be so important for the Maya culture. Next, by focusing on just one section of the text, I show how the spiritual message in it speaks to each indigenous person and invites them to act on behalf of their community.

Previous chapters have shown how with the conquest of the Americas there was a destruction of the natives' culture and traditions, and particularly of knowledge about them. Unlike other civilizations on the continent, those of the Mayan culture did not have to rely on the spoken word to preserve their ancestors' wisdom since they had developed "a sophisticated hieroglyphic script capable of recording complex literary compositions, both on folded screen

[344] Early, *Maya and Catholic Cultures in Crisis*, 311.

codices made of bark paper as well as texts incised on more durable stone or wood."[345] When the Spanish arrived in central America, they not only exploited the indigenous people by forcing them to work under cruel conditions, they also doggedly worked to eliminate their traditions and convert them to the Christian doctrine.

The missionaries in charge of this assignment saw the Maya's hieroglyphic codes as evil and worked strenuously to destroy them. Bartolome de las Casas grieved the actions of these religious leaders and he recorded the following in his writings: "these books were seen by our clergy, and even I saw part of those which were burned by the monks, apparently because they thought (they) might harm the Indians in matters concerning religion, since at that time they were at the beginning of conversion."[346] The epistemicide at the hands of the Church does not mean there was not an effort by the natives of the land to preserve some ancient knowledge. Professor Allen Christenson explains,

> Soon after the Spanish conquest, literate members of the highland Maya nobility made a number of transcriptions of their Precolumbian books utilizing a modified Latin script in an effort to preserve what they could of their recorded history and culture before they could be destroyed or lost. By far the most important extant example of such a transcription is the *Popol Vuh*, a lengthy document composed by anonymous members of the Quiché-Maya aristocracy in Guatemala soon after the fall of their capital city to the Spanish conquerors.[347]

The colonial powers perceived this attempt to preserve these documents as insubordination. As mentioned earlier, the Church would be responsible of destroying every cultural aspect of the indigenous people since it was perceived as being idolatrous.

[345] Allen J. Christenson, "Translator's Preface," *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 20.

[346] Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Apologética historia de las Indias*, Vol. 13 (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1958), 346.

[347] Christenson, "Translator's Preface," 21.

Christenson argues that the sacred text was hidden for generations in order to protect it from the Europeans and their Church, who insisted that everything from the Maya culture was evil: "the text of the *Popol Vuh* was kept hidden by indigenous elders for centuries in the town of Chichicastenango in Guatemala. So successful were these efforts to preserve early Colonial texts that two hundred years after the Conquest, a Spanish priest living in Chichicastenango named Francisco Ximénez wrote that the people of that town possessed many ancient books including the man manuscript of the *Popol Vuh.*"[348] On one occasion a Spanish priest from the Dominican order by the name of Francisco Ximenez mistering to different indigenous communities in Guatemala, who had deep ties to the Maya culture and appreciation of their traditions since he had forced himself to learn their language and lived with them, came across a copy of the *Popol Vuh* and he asked to borrow it. "Ximénez transcribed the Quiché text of the *Popol Vuh*, and added Spanish translations of its contents. It is unknown what happened to the sixteenth-century manuscript, although presumably Ximénez returned it to its Quiché owners. It's possible that the original may still survive in the possession of village elders or in the town archives of Chichicastenango." [349] Only a copy of Ximénez's translation has ever been found.

The *Popol Vuh* is the most important Maya text known to this indigenous population. K'iche Indigenous feminist and human rights activist from Guatemala, Rigoberta Menchú, describes this sacred text as a "complicated account of origins and social life whose details of, for instance, the multiple attempts of creating humans and the adventures of heroic twins signify information about Mayan agriculture, astronomy, calendrics, ecosystems, religious practices, and

[348] Christenson, "Introduction," 23.
[349] Christenson, "Introduction," 40.

numerous other domains."[350] I focus on this account of origins since I believe it speaks directly to our topic.

According to the *Popol Vuh*, the creation of persons preceded by 'Heart of Sky' and other deities including Quetzal Serpent, was a disappointing creation of animals whose original purpose was to worship them but failed to do so. The animals' destiny to live a life of harmony in the universe suddenly changed to a more tumultuous one in which, instead of gathering food for them, they would become someone else's food. The text recounts, "Nevertheless, because you have not been able to worship us or call upon us, there will yet be someone else who may be a worshiper. We shall now make one who will give honor. Your calling will merely be to have your flesh eaten."[351] And so mortal beings were created, in hopes that they would worship their creator.

The story of their creation happened in three acts. The first person was made out of mud, but that creation was not good and it fell apart. The gods regretted their decision and abandoned the prototype. "We have made a mistake; thus let this be merely a mistake. It cannot walk, neither can it multiply. Then let it be so. Let it be merely left behind as a thing of no importance."[352] The second attempt of creation was made of wood. According to the Mayan text, they "had the appearance of people and spoke like people as well. They populated the whole face of the earth…Nevertheless, they still did not possess their hearts nor their minds. They did not remember their Framer or their Shaper. They walked without purpose. They crawled on their

[350] Rigoberta Menchú, "Indigenous Atextualizatinos: The Popol Vuh and I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala," in *Specters of Conquest: Indigenous Absence in Transatlantic Literatures*, ed. Adam Lifshey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 41.

[351] Christenson, *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya*, 77.

[352] Christenson, *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya*, 78.

hands and knees and did not remember Heart of Sky."[353] Once again, their creation's inability to worship their makers angered the gods, who not only abandon this second experiment but decided to punish them with a great flood for their arrogance. Those who survived were turned into monkeys and were left to climb the trees.

After the many disappointments, the different deities involved in the creation came together and decided to make a third attempt. This time they chose to shape persons out of corn. "Thus, their frame and shape were given expression by our first Mother and our first Father. Their flesh was merely yellow ears of maize and white ears of maize. Mere food were the legs and arms of humanity, of our first fathers. And so there were four who were made, and mere food was their flesh."[354] This account continues by describing how the first people were able to walk, move, talk, and see everything perfectly. What was important for the gods was that, compared to the others, these creations had the ability to recognize their makers and be thankful.

Yet one thing that displeased them was that this people had perfect vision and could see to the four corners of the earth. So the deities counseled one another and decided to limits their power: "What now can be done to them so that their vision so that only little of the face of the earth can be seen by them? For it is not good what they say. Is not their existence merely framed, merely shaped? It is a mistake that they have become like gods."[355] And so the gods decided it would be better to blur their eyes to limit their vision and knowledge of the universe. This is the account of the creation of the Quiché Maya people according to the *Popol Vuh*.

The late Guatemalan author, Victor Perera, known predominantly for documenting his family's journey as Sephardic Jews in his book *The Cross and the Pear Tree* but also for his vast

[353] Christenson, *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya,* 83.
[354] Christenson, *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya,*195.
[355] Christenson, *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya,* 200.

publications regarding the Mayan culture in Guatemala, was one of the first and only scholars I found that made a link between the meaning of the creation story found in *Pool Vuh* and the Zapatista movement. In the early stages of the uprising in 1994, Perera wrote: "The maize plant was sacred to the gods; so the creatures whose blood and sinews they fashioned from the husk and kernels of white and yellow corn partook of their divinity. The men had such far vision that the envious gods dimmed their eyes 'as the face of mirror is breathed upon.' These men and women were the ancestors of the Mayas, who flourished on the American continent."[356] Regarding how the changes that occurred that year with the launch of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) threatened the way of life of the Maya community, Perera wrote:

> Tzeltal Mayas who left their hillside and jungle homes to join the insurgency told interviewers of their fear that NAFTA, an acronym whose meaning they only dimly understood, would lead to the loss of their last link to their Mayan ancestors: their *milpa*, or corn field. In their small parcels of inherited or purloined soil, the Mayas of Chiapas and Guatemala—to which Chiapas belonged until a century ago—plant their corn and beans. In this manner they preserve, however tenuously, their ancient covenant with Heart of Heaven, who created them in the image of their ancestors.[357]

In essence what Perera helps us to recognize is how the EZLN members opposed not only the oppressive conditions to which they had been subjected for the last five hundred years, but how with the help of their sacred text they recognize how the modern treaties between Mexico, Canada, and the United States endanger the future of their civilization by destroying something that is sacred to them: corn. What NAFTA did was to "allow the Mexican market to be flooded with imported corn from the United States, the vast majority of which is genetically

[356] Victor Perera, "Behind the Chiapas Revolt: Corn Gods, Dummy Rifles: Mexico: To the Mayan Militants, NAFTA will permanently sever them from their origins. They would be less-than-human men of wood," *LA Times*, accessed November 30, 2019, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-01-09-op-10002-story.html.

[357] Perera, "Behind the Chiapas Revolt: Corn Gods, Dummy Rifles."

modified."[358] This process not only endangers the economy of these indigenous communities who will not be able to compete with the prices, but more importantly, the corn entering the market "consisted of genetically modified organisms. Estimates of contamination vary according to locality, from 3 percent to 60 percent."[359] If the destruction of the corn is taking place before our eyes, then the annihilation of a great (corn-dependent) civilization is imminent.

The documentary film, *Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth* follows six different indigenous Maya in their daily struggle to live and maintain their tradition in Guatemala and Chiapas. Through the film we become aware of how transnational corporations in partnership with the government have invaded their sacred lands in order to extract natural resources at the cost of destroying life. While each story is different, their struggle to survive is the same. Each individual refers to the *Popol Vuh* to help explain the interconnectedness of the universe and the need to act.

The first scenes show Chepita, a Tzotzil Maya, on a bright and early morning picking corn in the fields. Right away, Chepita reiterates what the sacred book of the Maya says regarding the origins of her people. "We are the children of corn. It's our body and blood. In our ancient scripture, the *Popol Vuh* corn represents the cycle of life. It represents rebirth, growth, development, maturity, and death. Everything is connected. Nothing is excluded. The corn cycle is complete. The cycle of man and women is complete. That is what we believe. That is our life."[360] The invasion of transnational corporations in the highlands of Chiapas interferes with this life. The destruction of the mountains, the rivers, and even their corn is the destruction of the

[358] Christina Santini, "The People of the Corn," *Cultural Survival*, accessed December 29, 2019, https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/people-corn.

[359] Santini, "The People of the Corn."

[360] Erick Black and Frauke Sandig, *Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth*, (2015) DVD.

Maya civilization. Indigenous communities see this interconnection and for that reason many of them have decided to act.

Another Tzotzil Maya being followed in the film is Jeronimo, who recognizes that his people have no other choice but to organize and resist. “We, the Zapatistas, are still resisting here in Chiapas. We’re part of the indigenous, descendants of the Mayas. We cover our faces with banderas because the government has treated us as though we didn’t exist! Corn is sacred to us. It’s our main source of nutrition that our ancestors bequeathed to us. We are conserving and nurturing it.” The film concludes by highlighting how, in order to preserve the corn, the community must organize and speak up. The EZLN has given these communities a platform to speak up and thus has empowered them to act.

Toward the final scenes of the film, we see a gathering somewhere in the highlands of Chiapas of different indigenous people belonging to different Maya communities: Tzotziles, Tzeltales, Tojolabales, Choles, and Mames. They are all listening to a masked man, a member of the EZLN, express to the crowd the need to come together as members of the original people of those lands against the atrocities committed against their civilization by the government and also the transnational companies invading their land. “We decided to fight for our liberty, justice and for our rights. We Zapatistas, we are obligated to do something and not permit people greedy for power and money to finish off nature and humanity. If we don’t do anything, the corrupt officials and neoliberals won’t halt their plans of destruction and death.”[361] To preserve the sacred has become a duty for the EZLN, and for that reason I argue that the *Popol Vuh* helped many indigenous people understand their purpose and the need to join the movement.

Part II: Indian Revolt as a Religious War: Five Hundred Years of Exemplary Challenge to the Colonial Matrix

[361] Black and Sandig, *Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth*.

Bill Weinberg in his book *Homage to Chia*pas reminds us that of all the communities subjugated by the Spanish people on the American continent, "the Maya have been the most rebellious of Mesoamerica's conquered peoples."[362] Regarding the geographical term Mesoamerica, Mexican scholar Sylvia Marcos, whose research focuses mainly on Mesoamerican religions, gives a brief definition of what we this term means. Marcos writes that Mesoamerica is "the cultures of an area extending from mid-Mexico south to include most of Central America. In this region, complex and sophisticated civilizations attained a peak in religion, art, architecture, agriculture, medicine, and calendric knowledge. The communities in the area are not identical, but they share a common core and generative roots that allow us to make some generalizations."[363] While my focus in this chapter is the region of Chiapas, Marcos reminds us that there are similar cultures, traditions, and histories of oppression shared by other Mayan communities in Central America. The Mayan population in Meosamerica not only defied Spanish authority but had their own culture and forms of spirituality that they wanted to preserve even if at times they adopted certain components of the doctrine imposed by the missionaries. For that reason conversion to the Catholic faith took longer in Chiapas than in other parts of what would become Mexico.

Once more Weinberg maintains that in the region of Chiapas and the Lacandon Jungle, the Maya "refused to recognize the conquistadors, who told them that their sovereign was not Carlos V, the Holy Roman Emperor in Castille. These new lords of the land imposed a feudal order, but could never quench the cycles of Maya rebellion."[364] Even though the Chiapas

[362] Weinberg, *Homage to Chiapas*, 16.

[363] Sylvia Marcos, *Taken from the Lips: Gender and Eros in Mesoamerican Religions* (Leiden: Brill Academic, 2005), xx.

[364] Weinberg, *Homage to Chiapas*, 19.

Highlands were conquered in 1526 by Capt. Diego de Mazariegos, the Lacandon Jungle would remain 'wild,' which is what the term 'Lacandon' means. Eventually, "Capt. Pedro de Solorazaon was assigned the farcical task of 'pacifying the Lacandon rebellion.' When attacked, the Lacandons simply fled into the dense jungle. Spanish troops, with their horses, armor and cannons, were helpless to pursue."[365] The Lacandon Jungle in Chiapas would continue to provide the perfect hiding place for any rebellious groups since only natives would be able to survive in the dense vegetation and the Spanish soldiers, in spite of their superior weaponry, had limited knowledge of the many places where rebels could take cover.

As seen in the history of rebellion in this geographical location, the Zapatista movement is not something new but something built into its ancient traditions. With time and the presence of more troops throughout Mexico but specifically in the Chiapas highlands, Spanish dominion would be inevitable, but "conquest and conversion of the Indians was never really complete. More central so than the mestizos (those of mixed Spanish-Indian blood) and ladinos (those of Spanish culture) of the more central areas, Maya peoples remained suspended between Christianity and Indigenous cosmology."[366] The Maya community refused to give up their culture and traditions, many would adopt the Christian doctrine but would not abandon their own forms of spirituality. To that hybridity of spirituality of the indigenous population in this area, I highlight in this section what I believe has provided the strength to resist the EZLN. In this section I reference three incidents that took place in different periods during the conquest of the Americas that help us to see how religion and spiritualty have played a role in liberating indigenous communities. I believe there are multiple examples of indigenous rebellion inspired

[365] Weinberg, *Homage to Chiapas*, 19.
[366] Weinberg, *Homage to Chiapas*, 19.

by religious or spiritual concepts, yet not many of these accounts were properly documented or made available, perhaps to avoid inspiring others to revolt.

The first example to which I want to refer is that of the indigenous population resisting the conquistadors using their own spiritual methodology, which I believe is reflected in the current engagement of the indigenous community of the EZLN. This case takes us back to the early arrival of the Spanish people to the continent.

In his book *The Tears of the Indian*s, Bartolome de Las Casas recounts an incident from 1511 on the Island of Cuba, which captures the spirit of resistance imbedded in the indigenous people's identity in the Americas and that has been manifested for more than five hundred towards their oppressor. De Las Casas describes the interaction of an individual name Hathvey who had escaped to Cuba after being sentenced to death. Upon his arrival, he gathered with local 'Indians' and began warning them about the cruel treatment of the Spaniards towards the indigenous population based on previous events in other Caribbean Islands. "They do worship some covetous and unsatisfied Deity, and to content the greedy worship of that Celestial Power, they require many things from us, using all their endevour to murder and enslave us."[367] As he was communicating with the small 'Indian' group, Hathvey pointed at a small chest of gold and said, "Behold here is the God of the Spaniards." There was at first the suggestion to dance and sing as an act of worship in hopes of placating the anger of this deity, but then Hathvey told them that if they kept the precious metals, the Spanish conquistadors would not only take away the god, but they would kill all of them. Instead, he suggested they throw the small chest of gold in the river.

[367] Bartolome De Las Casas, *The Tears of the Indians*, transl. by John Phillips (Stanford: Academic Reprints, 2015), loc. 411, Kindle.

When the Spanish conquistadors came to the Island of Cuba, they began searching for him. Hathvey was savvy and found many ways of avoiding them. At times, he even used force to escape from them. However, eventually he was captured by them and sentenced to be burned to death for his rebellious attitude. While Hathvey was at the stake, a monk of the Order of St. Francis began to preach to him in hopes of converting him. The monk offered him the option of being spared of his death sentence if he accepted the doctrine of the Church. De Las Casas writes: "Upon which word after Hathvey had little while paus'd, he asked the Monk if the door of heaven was open to the Spaniards, who answering, Yes, to the good Spaniards. Then replied the other, Let me go to Hell that I may not come where they are."[368] Hathvey's fearless stand in the face of death embodies the attitude of many indigenous people during the conquest, even though history has generally refused to acknowledge and preserve testimony of their courageous acts. What is most important to highlight is their rejection of the colonial religion imposed on them, even when it meant losing their lives for doing so.

The second occurrence I highlight took place more specifically in Chiapas at the beginning of the eighteenth century and is commonly known as the 'Tzeltal Revolt of 1712.' This event is particularly significant for demonstrating that a religious event has the ability to trigger an insurrection led by indigenous people. For some reason, the many apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Americas run parallel to the five hundred years of colonization on the continent. According to the Catholic Church, the first appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe happened on December 12, 1531 to an indigenous man named Juan Diego in the hills of Tepeyac. Many readers are probably familiar with this narrative and how in time the Church canonized Juan Diego to become the first indigenous saint of the Americas. Virgilio Elizondo

[368] De Las Casas, *The Tears of the Indians*, loc. 423, Kindle.

gives a more detailed account of this event and its significance to all Latin Americans in his book *Guadalupe: Mother of a New Creation,* when he offers a new theological contribution called Mestizo Theology. Nevertheless, the narrative that I would like to highlight next has a different outcome, one that the Church would perhaps would like to forget.

Even though many instances are reported on which the Virgin appeared to indigenous people, the event of 1712 was one of the only ones recorded that escalated into a war. Perhaps it gave Don Miguel Hidalgo Y Costilla a blueprint, if he was aware of this event. According to the account, the Virgin appeared to a young Tzotzil girl named Dominica Lopez from San Juan Cancuc and asked her to build a place of worship in the Virgin's name. Bill Weinberg in his book *Homage to Chiapas: The New Indigenous Struggles in Mexic*o writes in more detail about this event: "As the construction commenced, the local priest ordered participating Indians [to be] flogged, accusing them of 'consorting with the Devil.' Indians resisted, and the priest fled for his life. Cancuc renounced Spanish priests and established an Indian priesthood."[369] Twenty-one surrounding communities came together in Tzeltal village of Cancuc to celebrate and declare "Ya no hay Dios ni Rey!" ("Now there is neither God nor King!"),[370] as way of calling for independence from Spanish rule. In order to suppress the rebellion, a *Ladino*[371] army was sent to the city by the Spanish authorities, yet the indigenous community, which had ordained their own indigenous people to the priesthood, organized and with machetes and clubs defeated the

[369] Weinberg, *Homage to Chiapas*, 23.

[370] Kevin Gosner, "Historical Perspectives on Maya Resistance: The Tzeltal Revolt of 1712," in *Indigenous Revolts in Chiapas and the Andean Highlands*, eds. Kevin Gosner and Arij Ouweneel (Amsterdam: Center for Latin American Research and Documentation, 1996), 27.

[371] The term *Ladino* is simply defined by Weinberg in his book as 'Spanish-Speaker, non-Indian' but is also used to describe a category of race in the Spanish colonies referring to those of *mestizaje* descent between the indigenous population and Spanish colonizers. Bill Weinberg, *Homage to Chiapas: The New Indigenous Struggles of Mexico* (Verso: London, 2000),

invading army. “In retaliation, the Soldiers of the Virgin marched on Ocosingo and slaughtered the Spanish inhabitants—except the women, who were abducted to Cancuc and married to Indian men (in reversal of the double standard). Captured *ladinas* were forced to dress as Indian women, to grind *maíz* and make *tortillas*.”[372] This anti-colonial account could have inspired others throughout time to take actions against their oppressors, knowing that by coming together they create a serious threat to the Spanish authorities, even if they did not have the military knowledge or the same weapons capability.

The third account appears in Victoria Reifler Bricker’s book, *The Indian Christ, The Indian King* and describes the ‘Quistel rebellion’ of 1761. Evidently there was a Maya named Jacinto Canek who lived under the protection of a Franciscan friar in a monastery where he studied ‘Latin and moral theology.’[373] There are sources that indicate that Canek became familiar with a copy of Father Diego de Lopez de Cogolludo’s history of the conquest of the Yucatan Peninsula. Bricker writes that “this knowledge would have made him aware of the fact that the Maya had once been independent, which would have given him a motive for starting a rebellion.”[374] In time, the Church would attribute Canek’s insubordinate attitude towards the Spanish authority to his education. For that reason, priests years later would refuse to educate the indigenous people for fear of more insurrections.

Qusteil was a small town, and on November 19,1761 members of the town were having a meeting to organize a future celebration in honor of “the patron saint of the town, Our Lady of the Conception.”[375] Some were drunk and Jacinto Canek suggested that they use the funds for the

[372] Weinberg, *Homage to Chiapas*, 24.
[373] Victoria Reifler Bricker, *The Indian Christ, The Indian King: The Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), loc. 2475, Kindle.
[374] Bricker, *The Indian Christ, The Indian King*, loc. 2475, Kindle.
[375] Bricker, *The Indian Christ, The Indian King*, loc. 2475, Kindle.

future celebration to continue partying. At the same time there are some reports that indicate that Canek spoke against the religious leaders of the town "for their unpriestly behavior which set a bad example for the Indians to whom they were supposed to give a Christian education." He also voiced his aversion to the Spanish for their oppressive behavior against the indigenous population, which included cruel labor and high taxes. Canek then called on everyone gathered there to "throw off their yoke of servitude"[376] and join him in an armed rebellion. Official reports indicate that the people proclaimed Canek king and crowned him "with the Crown and Mantle of Our Lady of Conception, Patroness of that town."[377].This act was not only considered sacrilegious but a challenge to the Spanish authorities, who sent their army to "restore peace" in the town. Hundreds of indigenous peasants joined Canek in fighting the Spanish soldiers before he was apprehended and eventually killed. With time the movement was crushed. Nonetheless, the courageous stand by Canek and his followers would be remembered, even though the Spanish authorities tried to minimize his effort.

Conclusion

As the years pass, the 1994 EZLN uprising seems to have been forgotten by most people except the indigenous communities who continued to be in the struggle and as they tried to find ways to maintain their existence separate from the colonial matrix embedded in society. Rebel indigenous continue to hold on to their traditions and fight because there is no other choice. Native Mesoamerican spirituality has played a significant role in inspiring indigenous people to organize and defend the sacred. Drawing on the *Popol Vuh*, many have found meaning to join the struggle.

[376] Bricker, *The Indian Christ, The Indian King*, loc. 2475, Kindle.
[377] Bricker, *The Indian Christ, The Indian King*, loc. 2475, Kindle.

This chapter also reviewed a few events of history in which indigenous people took actions against their oppressors by finding inspiration in some type of spiritual source. Even though these accounts are not always mentioned in the official literature, by recounting them many others were inspired.

Epilogue:

The Role of Religion in the Zapatista Uprising and The Emergence of Theology India

In the last twenty-five years since the uprising of the Zapatista National Liberation Army, much has been written about the conditions that led to the establishment of this movement. Analyses have been done about the strategies used by the indigenous communities to be counted as equal members of Mexican society and how the members of the group chose to arm themselves in order to fight for their land and their dignity. Similarly, after many years there has been much discussion of the outcomes of this revolt and what changes it brought to the indigenous population in Chiapas. Unfortunately, in all the reading I have done regarding this movement, no author has focused on how religion played a significant role in the formation of the EZLN. While it was clear that the leadership of this movement did not want to be associated with any religious institution for fear of creating a distraction that would cause division among the groups and would made them forget their goals, I argue throughout the dissertation that religion contributed to the marginalization of the indigenous population from the time the Spanish conquistadors arrived and yet religion was also an instrument that inspired the communities to organize and fight for their rights, either through Christian faith, Mesoamerica forms of spirituality, and/or Islam.

I began the first chapter by stating that from the beginning of time individuals have used religion to give meaning to the enigmatic things of life but also to the ordinary. Similarly, some have used religion to promote their own interests, which may benefit only a few while harming many others. Throughout history we have seen political powers use religion to endorse certain ideologies and advance an agenda that seeks to dominate a particular population or occupy a specific geographical location. The first blueprint of this was perhaps created by the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great who made Christianity the dominant religion. Constantine's

decision to accept a form of Christianity opened the doors for this tradition to expand throughout the empire, but most importantly it formed a new partnership in which the state church was established. This arrangement made it possible for Christianity to spread certain ideologies. One of these ideologies promoted by Christianity, which I emphasized in the beginning of this dissertation, was the idea that the world was divided into three continents Asia, Africa and Europe. Each geographical location was assigned to one of Noah's son: Japhet, Seth, Ham, based on the account of Genesis 9–10. This belief established the foundations of the racial classification in which Europe, with the help of Christian faith occupied the top while Africa, the 'cursed' continent, became the bottom of this grouping. As presented in this dissertation, this interpretation solidified the idea that Africans were not humans and excused the atrocities committed by Europeans towards them. Correspondingly this narrative also inspired the desire to expand their dominion outside Europe. The so-called 'discovery' of another continent and its people in 1492 altered this argument of three continents and created a completely new category in the racial classification used in Europe. Most importantly, this event marked the beginning of a new era in which European nations sought to assert themselves as the global power, specifically here the country of Spain.

The 'discovery' of America not only saw the appropriation of natural resources and the land but by promoting this myth of a 'discovery' Europeans negated the history of an entire continent and denied the humanity of the inhabitants. The events that took place at the end of the fifteenth century set in motion a period in which those of non-European descent suffered severe subjugation, specifically the indigenous population of the newly 'discovered' lands. This is where the Zapatista National Liberation Army enters the story and this is why in the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle claims: "We are the product of five hundred years of

struggle."[378] During the research for this dissertation, I have tried to analyze the events that took place five hundred years ago to understand better the how the EZLN was formed. But most importantly, I attempted to see how religion played a role in this entire process.

Even though Columbus was credited for 'discovering' a new continent and its inhabitants, it was his religious tradition that categorized the level of humanity of those inhabitants and compared them to Africans, insisting that the indigenous population could be 'redeemed' only if they converted to the Christian faith. This too was a lie for the acceptance of the Church's doctrine did not "give" them full humanity, as explained in detail in this research.

The subjugation of the natives of the Americas was part of a master plan conceived in the Iberian Peninsula and tried there on the Jewish and Muslim population. The forceful approach of conversion of these two communities became a model used in the new colonies. Likewise, when individuals refused to accept the Christian doctrine, they were killed, and this caused not only a genocide but also an epistemicide of these communities, since their traditions, cultures, and beliefs were also destroyed. This approach was also implemented in the Americas with natives who chose to keep their traditions and forms of spirituality.

Likewise, as I examined the role of religion in the formation of the EZLN, I argued that religious traditions of the indigenous population in the Americas contributed indirectly to their lack of preparation and ineffective response to the Spanish invasion, which resulted in the destruction of Tenochtitlan and eventually in the subjugation of the entire continent at the hands of the Spanish colonizers. Even though the true motivation for the conquest of the Americas at the hands of the Spanish was the greed for gold and other natural resources, religion played a role in concealing their ambition, and so the idea of evangelizing the natives was promoted to

[378] Marcos, *Shadows of Tender Fury*, 54.

ease the guilt of all those involved. As mentioned earlier, the forceful conversions of the natives had been already used in the Iberian Peninsula towards the Muslim and Jewish communities. Perhaps the argument in the Americas was different since the intention was to 'redeem' the idolatrous natives as opposed to how Jews and Muslims were viewed as people without hope. The concept of 'tabula raza' was promoted by Christopher Columbus and supported by the Spanish Crown with the blessing of the Church. In this research, I emphasized the role of the Church in association with the colonial powers not only in excusing and even promoting the subjugation but also in benefitting from gold, land, and even the natives. El Requerimiento was really a theological excuse to validate the Church's legal appropriation of the land. This model had already been practiced in the Iberian Peninsula.

As I scrutinized the role of religion in the colonization of the American continent, I also claimed that religion played a role in inspiring the fight for liberation of the most marginalized members of society. While the colonizers' options were to 'convert or die,' there were missionaries who, inspired by their own faith, advocated for the liberation of the indigenous population and most importantly for the recognition of their humanity five hundred years ago. In this research, I highlighted different religious figures who implemented this approach in their ministry. I believe their advocacy inspired the Liberation Theology movement, which played an important role in the organization of the different communities in the Lacandon Jungle and perhaps contributed directly to the formation of the EZLN. In the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, there is mention of two other religious figures who inspired the movement with application of their faith in the fight for liberation. Don Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla and his student Jose Maria Morelos y Pavón exemplified the use of redemptive violence and for that they were mentioned by the EZLN even though the organization has worked hard to avoid any

religious affiliation. The Bishop of Chiapas, Don Samuel Ruiz, also known by the indigenous people as 'El Tata,' built his ministry on the approach of these religious figures of the past and help the different Maya communities in Chiapas see their value and the need to fight for their rights even though there has not been much information about his encouragement of their use of weapons. His approach was questioned by the officials of the Church but trusted by the EZLN, who at some point when it came to working towards peaceful resolutions chose Samuel Ruiz to mediate between them and the government. His legacy would always be linked with the work of the indigenous population and perhaps even blamed for indirectly inspiring them to revolt.

At first it may seem bizarre to link the Zapatista movement to the fastest growing religion in the world, Islam. The arrival of the Movimiento Mundial Murabitum, almost a year after the conflict started in Chiapas, saw an attempt to link these distinct movements who, according to the Spanish missionaries, had a lot in common. The only request given by this Spanish Sufi organization was for the EZLN to convert to Islam and they would automatically find a global community fighting for the same cause. While in my research I found no documentation that the leadership of the EZLN entertained this proposal, nevertheless I noticed that the missionaries were able to spread Islam among different indigenous people in San Cristobal de Las Casas, creating a small Muslim community. Even though some might argue that the Mayan traditions have no relation to Islam since it is foreign to the Americas, if we continue looking at the events that took place five hundred years earlier, perhaps we can see a connection to the indigenous' struggle on this continent. In this document, I argued that even though Islam was present on the Iberian Peninsula for centuries, it was not until the association of the Spanish Crown with the Christian Church that the focus shifted to Muslims and Jews. The atrocities committed in the name of religion to Muslims and Jews on the Iberian Peninsula were also committed against the

indigenous population in the Americas, producing an indirect association. Similarly, the religious intolerance forced Muslims and Jews who chose not to convert to the Christian doctrine to migrate to other parts of Europe and North Africa. Yet others searched for a new beginning in the 'New World,' in spite of all the restrictions by the Spanish Crown forbidding them from traveling to their colonies. Even though many Muslims came to the Americas incognito, there is plenty of evidence that they arrived with the Spanish conquistadors, since they have been present on the continent for five hundred years.

Finally, I conclude that at the end, it was the Maya tradition that encouraged many indigenous to join the EZLN. The main source of inspiration was the Popol Vuh, the sacred book of the Maya, that gave meaning to the revolt and influenced many to join the EZLN. While for the last five hundred years the colonial powers have attempted to erase the traditions of the indigenous population not just in Mexico but throughout Latin America, the preservation of this text speaks of the efforts indigenous communities have made to maintain their traditions. As the indigenous people read the narratives found in this text, they realized they had to fight to survive; after all, they had plenty of examples in the last five hundred years of indigenous individuals who used their own form of spirituality to fight colonial powers.

At the end of this project, I believe there is genuine association of the field called 'Teología India' with the Zapatista movement. Compared to what Liberation Theology attempts to do, which is to focus on preferential option of the poor, Teologia India or 'Sabiduria India' (Indigenous Wisdom) "commits to itself to build a theological perspective in harmony with the Mayan Cosmos,"[379] according to Sylvia Marcos. This field is linked to the spirituality of the

[379] Sylvia Marcos, "Teología India: Indigenous Contributions to Theological Thought," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 19, no. 1 (November 2013): 23.

indigenous communities that perhaps have been intermingled with certain Catholic practices that goes to the pre-columbian era and to which the EZLN is fighting to preserve. Without much publications on this subject, there is a great opportunity for modern societies to research and learn from cosmology of the 'true inheritors of this nation.'

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